THE MAN BEHIND THE BOOK

HENRY VAN DYKE

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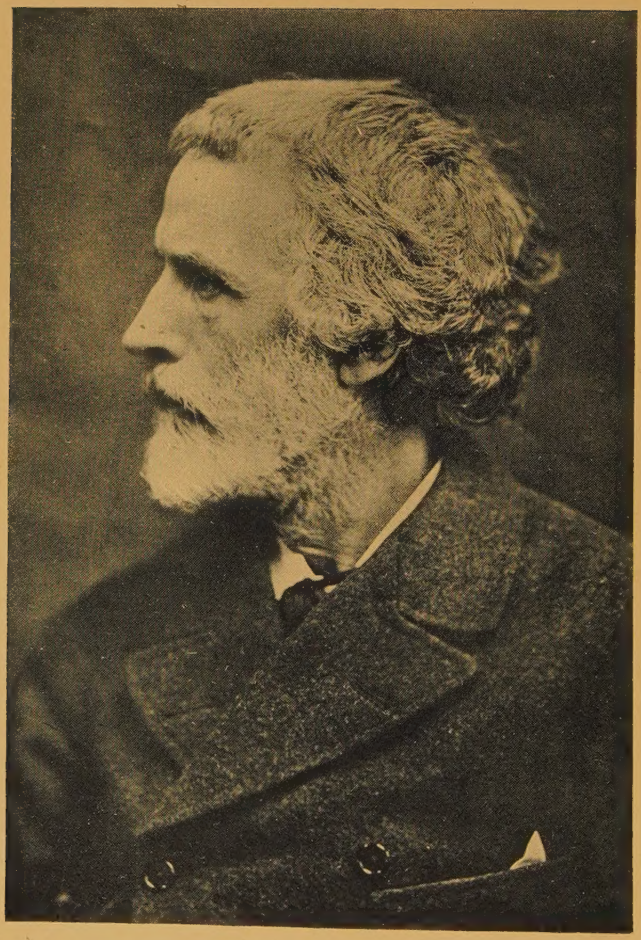
THE MAN BEHIND THE BOOK:
ESSAYS IN UNDERSTANDING



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THE MAN BEHIND THE BOOK:

ESSAYS IN UNDERSTANDING

BY

HENRY VAN DYKE

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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DEDICATED TO

JOHN HALL WHEELOCK

POET AND FRIEND

SACRAMENTO STATE

PREFACE

The preface is usually the last part of a book to be written. So it tends to take on a tone of mock-modest apology or of concealed approbation, both of which are rather futile things. If a book demands apology, why print it? If it needs commendation, the author is not the one to give it. I should like this preface to be merely an explanation of the title.

In every book that is worth reading, it seems to me, something of the writer is disclosed. Authors are not algebraic symbols; they are living persons of the *genus homo*, male and female, with characters and experiences of their own. Unless some of this personality gets into it, a book is of little worth. The danger of schools and theories of literature is that they are likely to produce uniformity, a patterned perfection, or imperfection, from which the sap of life has withdrawn. This is sad, bad, and very tiresome.

You must live before you can really write. That is the meaning of the first part of my title: *The Man Behind the Book.*

The second part, *Essays in Understanding*, is intended to make clear the meaning of the first part. As one who has always preferred to be called a teacher of reading, rather than a Professor of Literature, I find a good motto in the question which Philip put to the Ethiopian eunuch, reading in his chariot as he passed through the desert on his way home to Queen Candace: "Understandest thou what thou readest?"

Understanding is the first thing that we owe to a book and to the writer behind it. Without that how can we judge, or approve, or condemn? Public censorship is a futile device to escape personal responsibility. We should disregard the ticker-reports of the literary stock-market, the propaganda of the cliques and côteries, the flaming book-notices written in the

explosive style used in advertising refrigerators, tooth-paste, and vacuum cleaners. We should not be swayed by the verdicts of the Literary Guilders, nor even by the awards of Academic Prize committees. We must read with our own eyes. We must try to see books as they really are; parts of life, noble or mean or base; expressions, or impressions, or sometimes merely depressions of the mind of man; never quite separable from the character and experience of their authors, yet sometimes rising far above the soil, as a palm fed by hidden waters may lift its bright head above the desert sand.

Read what you like, I say, but try to understand what it really is and just why you like it.

HENRY VAN DYKE.

AVALON,
April 15, 1929.

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I

LIGHTS IN POETRY

I

THE MORNING STAR

THE MORNING STAR

GEOFFREY CHAUCER has been well and wisely praised by many of his brother-poets,—by none better than by the American, James Russell Lowell. American scholars also, like Francis Child, Thomas Lounsbury, Mark Liddell, and Robert Root of Princeton, have made valuable contributions to the knowledge of Chaucer's life and works. In that high company of Chaucerian critics I can claim no place. I write not as a learned master, but simply as a grateful reader of the poetry of

> "Dan Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath
> Preluded those melodious bursts that fill
> The spacious times of great Elizabeth."

The first to give him the shining title of "the morning star" was John Denham, a poet of the Restoration, author of a once famous piece of

descriptive verse called "Cooper's Hill." Lines from that piece are still quotable and quoted. But it seems to me that his luminous Chaucerian epithet, flashing out in 1667, was Denham's best claim to a tomb in Westminster Abbey close beside Chaucer.

The next poet to use this brilliant phrase, dimming it a little with needless verbiage, was Wordsworth, who wrote of Chaucer in 1827,

> "O great Precursor, genuine morning star."

In 1830 Tennyson used the same figure, restoring its pristine brightness by one of his inimitable touches:

> "I read, before my eyelids dropt their shade,
> *'The Legend of Good Women,'* long ago
> Sung by the morning star of song, who made
> His music heard below."

Yet there is no reason to think that any one of these poets pilfered the phrase from another. It is an image so natural, so fair, so full of

meaning, that it may easily have come to all three of them without literary prompting. Certainly it is richer and more beautiful than the somewhat similar figure which Lydgate used to describe Chaucer in 1420,——

"Sithe of our language he was the lode-sterre."

He was an admirable leader for a new galaxy of poets. After the brilliant epochs of Greece and Rome and France and Italy, he came to inaugurate the long glory of poesy in England.

In the first place, he was master of a fluent, lucid, vigorous English style, modern enough, in spite of antique words and spellings, to make his poems pleasanter reading in their original form than in Pope's stiff paraphrases. In the second place, his poetry is full of life and love, courage and joy. It is not free from occasional coarseness of imagery and expression. But these "external blots," as Lowell calls them, are not the rotten spots of a decadent and morbid spirit;

they are only a natural reflection of the rude manners of a frankly indelicate age.

Chaucer tells each dramatic tale as the person of the story would have told it; and some of those persons had a rough vocabulary. But the poet himself deserves Spenser's praise as "a sacred happy spirit." He is a man of quick eye, generous sympathy, and clean conscience,—a lover of nature and mankind and his own country,—an open-air scholar; a social bard; friendly, free, and debonair, yet intimate with great books and capable of reverent thought on deep themes,—an accomplished gentleman of his time and an honest Christian of his era.

He was born in London about 1340, the son of a wine-merchant. He first appears in any record in 1357, when the Duchess of Clarence, daughter-in-law of King Edward III, bought the boy a pretty suit of red and black clothes, and made him a Christmas gift of 2s. 6d. He was probably a page in the gay ducal household,

and Philippa, whom he married later, was a maid-in-waiting to the Queen. In those days, domestic service was not considered menial. A ladies'-maid or a valet was one of the household, quite as good as a shopkeeper or a manufacturer. That was before democracy introduced its deadly class-distinctions which have made "servant" a tabooed word.

Young Chaucer went to war in France with the King, and was taken prisoner. This gave him a chance to study French poetry and romance. In 1361 he was one of thirty-seven royal esquires for whom Christmas robes were provided. Often he received gifts of money or rich raiment by royal or princely favor; and he needed them, for he was usually in debt, even with his wife's pension to aid his budget. Perhaps she added more to the debit than to the credit side. Sometimes ladies have that effect on finance. But she was a good wife and Chaucer praised her in fine verse.

When he was about thirty he began his diplomatic services. He was sent as Envoy Extraordinary to Paris, Genoa, and Florence; later, on a secret mission to Flanders; and again to France to arrange a French marriage for King Richard, which did not come off. He was appointed a Collector of Customs at the port of London, and elected to Parliament as knight of the shire from Kent. Then his patron, the Duke of Lancaster, went out of power, and Chaucer retired to innocuous desuetude and work on the *Canterbury Tales*. Another political upheaval brought the Lancasters back, and Chaucer sent King Henry IV a poem called *A Complaint to His Empty Purse*. The King remembered his father's old favorite and doubled his income. Thus after many adventures, Chaucer died in comfort in the year 1400, and was honored with a tomb in Westminster Abbey. As Sir Lucius O'Trigger says: "It's very snug, lying in the abbey."

The large body of poetry which Chaucer left

to the world has been divided, like *Omnis Gallia* in Cæsar's *Commentaries*, into three parts. First, the French period, including the translation from *The Romaunt of the Rose*, and *The Book of the Duchess*. Second, the Italian period, including the translation of Boëthius, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Parliament of Fowles*, *and The House of Fame*. Last, the English period, when he was busy mainly with the *Canterbury Tales*. This three-fold division is convenient and would be very nice if we only knew accurately the dates of all his poems. The trouble is that we often have to guess at the dates of the poems by their place in the supposed period; while the periods are built up by the conjectural dates of the poems. This leaves the globe poised on the elephant, and the elephant standing on the tortoise, and the tortoise supported by the shadow of the elephant. Yet upon the whole the three-fold theory is handy, and as credible as most literary theories.

Come we now to the main matter of this essay: Chaucer's poetry. Let us begin with *The Boke of the Duchesse*, written on the death of Lady Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, first wife of Chaucer's great friend, John of Gaunt.

Take here the passage which describes the charms of this most lovely woman,—so white, so shapely, so merry, so kind, so friendly, so soft of speech,—"one of the most beautiful portraits of a woman," says James Russell Lowell, "that was ever drawn, . . . such a figure as you would never look for in a ballroom but might expect to meet in the dewy woods, just after sunrise when you were hunting for late violets." Hear her husband tell how he loved her:

> "For certes, she was, that swete wyf,
> My suffisaunce, my lust,[1] my lyf,
> Myn hap,[2] myn hele,[3] and al my blisse,
> My worldes welfare and my lisse,
> And I hers hoolly, every del."[4]

Listen how he compares her, with long-winded

[1]joy. [2]luck. [3]health. [4]whit.

learning, after the fashion of the times, to all the famous and lovely ladies of antiquity, and concludes wisely that she was as witty as Esther, and as good as Penelope, worthy to be loved by Alcibiades, or Hercules, or Hector, or Alexander the Great. After all this laborious encomium, stiff with scholarship as a brocaded robe with jewels, the end comes suddenly,—a stroke of simple, human pathos:

"Sir," quoth I, "where is she now?"
"Now!" quoth he, and stopped anon,
And grew as dead as any stone.
He said, "Alas that I was born!
I told thee when we met this morn
That I had suffered loss and woe
More deep and great than thou could know.
God wot, alas, that loss was she."
"Alas, sir, how? What may that be?"
"She is dead!" "Nay!" "Yes, it is true!"
"Is that your loss? By God, well may you rue!"

Here is the true note of tragedy,—straight and swift, piercing the heart like a knife, with in-

finite pity and regret,—the irrevocable, the inexplicable, the unspeakable grief,—

"The rest is silence."

Chaucer was not a great scholar, but he was a wide and various reader, and like all men of genius, he assimilated what he read and made free use of it in his own writing. He borrowed not only from the French romances, but also from Ovid and Boëthius among the ancients; and he was familiar with the work of his great contemporaries Petrarch and Boccaccio. Yet he was original, as Shakespeare was original, in giving to every story that he took from other writers, new life and significance; in making every philosophic thought that he adopted glow with new lustre. It is not merely that he recuts, reshapes the borrowed gem. He seems to receive it into his own mind, where it is fused and recrystallized, coming forth with the fresh color and brilliancy of a new thing.

He knows the secret of all great literature: the modernity of the past, and the antiquity of the present. Living in one of the famous "ages of transition," the Renaissance, he has the good sense to perceive the continuity of human life, which is not broken by any transitions of form. Gunpowder and the printing-press and the steam-engine and electricity have no effect upon its essential factors, which are pain and pleasure, hope and fear, faith and doubt, love and hate.

When Alexander the Great cut his finger, it hurt and bled just as Chaucer's did, just as yours and mine would do, in the same circumstances. Men and women fell in love and fought and died in the age of Pericles very much as they did in the age of Edward III, and as they do to-day.

If Chaucer had written a story of the times before the Flood, he would have made his readers feel the wetness of water and the hotness of

fire and the glow of passion and the chill of old age and the strange humor and pathos of life, precisely as they were felt in fourteenth-century England. If he were alive now, he would describe a Glidden Automobile Tour precisely as he described a Canterbury Pilgrimage of the olden time,—with a realism keenly alive to the vividness of external facts and sublimely aware of their insignificance. He would make us feel the onward current of life, into which all that men have felt and known and done and written in the past enters in the present and flows on toward the future,—an ancient, new and ever-changing stream which runs from mystery to mystery.

Chaucer undoubtedly learned much from Italy, both in narrative and in artistic form, as may be seen in *The Parliament of Fowles*, *The House of Fame*, and *The Legend of Good Women*. But he was a very Englishman in spirit and fibre. And when he came to his ma-

turity at about forty-five years of age, and tackled his great work, the *Canterbury Tales*, his native genius dominated and moulded all his foreign material, and produced a poem full of the very life of England.

You must remember that John Bull as he is pictured in *Punch*—pursy, phlegmatic, dense, respectable, insulated and impregnable, the proud result of the reigns of the four Georges and Victoria—did not yet exist. The Englishman of the fourteenth century was a much more alert and vivacious person, of a highly adventurous and humorous temperament, more closely in touch with the rest of the world, less regular in his habits and conventional in his manners, but probably more interesting and certainly of a nimbler wit and a warmer sentiment. Chaucer was an Englishman of that kind, and if you will imagine a royal court in which this son of a vintner, this unacademic scholar, this easy-going pensioner, was a favorite of the king, an im-

portant official, and a trusted diplomatic envoy, you will get an idea of the England of that day.

His *Canterbury Tales* were built upon a very simple plan. The shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury, three or four days' journey from London, was a favorite goal of pilgrimage in England, in those times when piety and pleasure went hand in hand. Chaucer imagined a chance-met company of nine-and-twenty pilgrims, gathered in the Tabard Inn at Southwark, and agreeing to beguile the way to Canterbury with stories. Each pilgrim, including the poet, was to tell two tales going and two on the way back. This would have made 120 stories. But as often happens in real life, some of the stories were interrupted, and some the company declined to hear, and some the pilgrims did not tell, and some the poet did not record, and in the end the company did not get to Canterbury at all, but only came within sight of its towers. Four days they

travelled together, through April sunshine and showers, over hill and dale, an oddly consorted fellowship of gentlefolk and common folk, rich and poor, clergy and laity, grave and gay, sober and drunken, mingling in the strange democracy of a common journey, yet ever frankly aware of the differences among them, and speaking and acting each according to his or her character and station in life. The presence of three feminine pilgrims,—the Prioress, the Nun, and the Wife of Bath,—perhaps delayed the journey a little, but did not seem to impose any restraint upon the stories. Indeed, it was the lady from Bath who, in her Prologue, told the most dubious tale of all, like many a modern female novelist.

In the interludes between the stories there was some serious conversation and much lively badinage, in which the Host of the Tabard Inn, who accompanied the pilgrims as a sort of "personal conductor" of the tour, played a leading part.

On the afternoon of the fourth day, as they drew near to Canterbury, the Host demanded a story from the grave and godly Parson, who had formerly rebuked him for swearing, and whom in turn he had accused of being a Lollard, a heretic in disguise. The Parson replied,

"Thou getest fable noon y-told fro me,"

and forthwith pronounced an interminable, dry, and highly orthodox prose sermon on Penitence, with a terrible digression on the Seven Deadly Sins. With this, Chaucer breaks off his narration of narratives, and adds a pathetic little epilogue, praying pardon for all his "translacions and endytinges of worldly vanitees," and giving thanks that he has had the grace to translate "Boethius on the Consolations of Philosophy and other books of legends of saints, and homilies and morality and devotion."

Perhaps the best known part of the *Canterbury Tales* is the *Prologue:*

"Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote:"

How many schoolboys and schoolgirls have studied it, and puzzled their heads over its pronunciation, and forgotten it, like enough, without ever getting a glimpse of its imaginative power, its descriptive skill, its keen wit, its human sympathy! Here, in a few hundred lines, is a wonderful portrait-gallery of Chaucer's England. Each of these persons stands out distinctly in his habit as he lived, and their brief pilgrimage together, of which so little is told of their deeds and so much of their talk is given, becomes to us as real a thing as ever happened.

The tales are of all kinds, taken from many sources, and some, no doubt, from Chaucer's own invention or experience. He tells them all with fluency, but in many manners, suiting his own tone, in most cases, to the character of the speaker,—the chivalrous, romantic knight; the vulgar, brawling miller; the grave and wise man

of law; the gentle, holy prioress; the frankly hypocritical but highly dramatic pardoner who sells spurious relics of the saints; the free-spoken wife of Bath; the sweet and pious nun; the studious, dreamy scholar of Oxford. Chaucer himself, in the character of a dainty poet, begins an exquisite burlesque of one of the sentimental romances of the day, but his ballad is so silly and tiresome that the Host interrupts him. "No more of this, for Goddes dignitee!" he cries, "you make my ears ache with your worthless stuff." So Chaucer must finish his contribution with a wordy and very prosaic allegory. Thus he shows the completeness and sanity of his humor by doing what few poets and not many humorists have been able to do, —enjoying a good joke at his own expense.

One of the noblest of the tales is that told by the Man of Law; the deepest and most pathetic is that told by the Prioress; one of the most skilful, graceful, and charming, is that told by the

© *Hollyer.*

GEOFFREY CHAUCER.
From a painting.

Nun's Priest, that is to say the chaplain who rode with the lady Prioress.

It is one of those ancient animal-epics, such as Rostand has cleverly re-introduced, and which the unlearned fashionable world has welcomed as a wonderful novelty. All the smart sets of Paris, London and New York, not long ago, cackled over *Chantecler* as if it were a new-laid egg. But here is the old story of the vain male chicken (the super-rooster, the type of the super-man), told by Chaucer with a charm, it seems to me, beyond Rostand's reach.

Chanticleer, the cock of the farm-yard, has a magical song.[1]

"In all the land, of crowing none his peer!
His voice was merrier than the organ loud
That plays at mass, in church, above the crowd.
His crowing was more certain in its time
Than is a clock, or even an abbey chime.
By nature knew he each ascencion
Of th'equinoctial in his native town,
And when fifteen degrees had been ascended
Then crew he, that it might not be amended."

[1] Here and elsewhere I have slightly modernized the English.

Dame Pertelote is the favorite among his seven wives. One night, roosting beside her, he tells her that a dreadful dream of a black fox has frightened him. She reproaches him for his timidity:

"I cannot love a coward, by my faith!
For sure, whatever any woman saith,
We every one desire, if it may be,
To have our husband hardy, wise and free."

He reacts to this and begins to tell long stories about dreams, protesting that his love and courage are so great that he is not afraid of anything. Day comes, and he struts about the yard, attentive to his wives.

"He looketh as it were a grim lion,
And on his toes he roameth up and down;
He deigneth not to set his foot to ground.
He chukketh when a grain of corn is found,
And then his seven wives run after him."

Now comes Russell, the sly old fox, creeping into the yard, and flattering the cock with a wonderful tale of his father's extraordinary

voice and how he always crowed with eyes shut. Russell would like to hear Chanticleer sing in the same way. But no sooner has the cock shut his eyes to best his father in crowing, than the fox grabs him by the neck and starts to run off with him. There is a terrible fracas in the farmyard; the feathered harem shrieks aloud; the women run out of the house; the cow and the calf, the hogs and the dogs all break loose. Meantime the fox is making for the woods with his booty on his back. But the cock even in that embarrassing situation does not lose his wits. He suggests that the fox, having won, ought to mock his foes, and shout back an insulting defiance. When he yields to this temptation, and opens his mouth to shout, Chanticleer breaks loose and flies into a tree. The fox begs him to come down, assuring him that he should suffer no harm. But the cock has learned his lesson.

"Nay, then," quoth he, "for may we both be curst,
And I'll be curst, both body, blood and bones,

If thou beguile me oftener than once.
No more thou'lt teach me with thy flattering tongue
To wink my eyes the while I sing my song;
For he that winketh when he needs to see,
God give him never more prosperity!"
"Nay," quoth the fox, "but may God send mischance
To him that hath no better governance
Than to talk loud when he should hold his peace."

So the merry tale runs, with many a sly hit at follies masculine and feminine, and plenty of shrewd satire in its clever burlesque of the inflated language of poets applied to the affairs of the chicken-yard.

This is a fair example of the lighter side of Chaucer's genius. Of its deeper power, its more serious movement among the strange problems and grave themes of mortal existence, we may find examples in others of the *Canterbury Tales*. For this is Chaucer's point of view, his theory of life.

Every journey in the world, he seems to say, even a brief spring-time pilgrimage, brings a

man in sight of comedy and tragedy. Both belong to human life, both are worth noting, both have their place in literature. But underneath this passing show, with its laughter and its tears, there are great laws of good and evil, of truth and falsehood, of baseness and nobility; and the true man, the noble man, is he who, whether he laughs or weeps by the way, is ever loyal at heart to these laws and pursues his journey steadfastly toward the goal to which they point him. Chaucer has put this philosophy into three very fine poems: one on *Lack of Steadfastness;* one on *Gentilesse,* that is, true nobility; and one entitled *A Balade of Good Counsel.* Of the last, which is perhaps his strongest poem, I shall try to give a rendering in modern English.

TRUTH

"Flee from the crowd and dwell with truthfulness:
Suffice thee with thy goods, tho' they be small:
To hoard brings hate, to climb brings giddiness;

The crowd has envy, and success blinds all;
Desire no more than to thy lot may fall;
Work well thyself, to counsel others clear,
And Truth shall make thee free, there is no fear!

"Torment thee not all crooked to redress,
Nor put thy trust in fortune's turning ball;
Great peace is found in little busy-ness;
And war but kicks against a sharpened awl;
Strive not, thou earthen pot, to break the wall;
Subdue thyself and others thee shall hear;
And Truth shall make thee free, there is no fear!

"What God doth send, receive in gladsomeness;
To wrestle for this world foretells a fall.
Here is no home, here is but wilderness:
Forth, pilgrim, forth; up, beast, and leave thy stall!
Know thy country, look up, thank God for all:
Hold the high way, thy soul the pioneer,
And Truth shall make thee free, there is no fear!"

LIGHTS IN POETRY

II

A LESSER COMET

A LESSER COMET

COMETS are celestial luminaries, but not fixed stars or planets. They are eccentric bodies which adorn, more than they illuminate, the sky. If their orbits are elliptic they come back at regular intervals. If their orbits are parabolic they call on the sun only once. Certain planets have families of comets: Jupiter has thirty; Neptune, six; Saturn, to whom the Greeks attributed a bad habit of devouring his children, has only two that still come home for the holidays.

The precise nature of a comet is something of a mystery, and its appearance was formerly regarded with terror. But we now know that though very brilliant, comets are not weighty, and are more fitted to give us pleasure than to do us harm. The head is a luminous cloud of transparent stuff, which swells and shrinks, as

the heads of some men do. The shining tail, which may be from five million to a hundred million miles long, is an emanation of highly rarefied matter, a gorgeous sight but not at all a perilous portent. A head-on collision between one of these vast, shining nebulosities and our solid, dumpy, little globe is not likely to occur; but if it did, it would hardly damage the earth more than one of Mr. Ford's "tin Lizzies" could hurt a bootlegger's ponderous transportation truck. All the same, a first-rate comet is one of the finest sights in the universe, always wonderful, and as our modern sloppy stylists would say, "intriguing," although it has no intrigue about it.

This valuable astronomical information, gathered from books, may serve as an introduction to remarks on two American poets, the first of whom I shall call A Lesser Comet.

Edgar Allan Poe emerged from mystery in 1809, and disappeared into mystery in 1849.

He was one of those brilliant, erratic characters about whom controversy rages, and people can not help taking sides, and miseries gather like vultures. His admirers claim that he was a persecuted genius, an Angel of the Beautiful, martyred in a world of philistines. His detractors say that he was vain, malicious, and shallow, a sort of literary Cagliostro, wrecked by his own unstable nature and dissipated habits. The controversy continues. Two new books on Poe have appeared this year. One claims to be "A Standard and *Final* Biography." But this claim is put in question by the subsequent publication of *Israfel: the Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe;* two voluble volumes, in which the angelic theory is sustained with difficulty and mainly by the exhibition of John Allan, Poe's foster-father, in a diabolic light.

I fail to see much profit in this voluminous discussion of domestic details. The number of Mr. Allan's alleged illegitimate children has

nothing to do with the real value of Poe's short stories and lyrics. The man himself, frail and passionate shadow, has escaped beyond our praise or blame. The fire of his literary quarrels has died out; even the ashes are cold. All that remains of him is a handful of brief tales, full of terror or of clever ratiocination, and a cluster of lyrical poems, full of lingering music and weird dreams.

Yet to appreciate these, and to understand why they are so few, but of their kind so wonderful, we must know something of the author's character and life. The key of this enigma I find in a French volume written twenty years ago by M. Emile Lauvrière. This is, in my judgment, far and away the best study of the life and work of Poe. He was in reality a neurotic; physically and mentally of a morbid type; inheritor of a *tare tyrannique*. Whether he could have overcome this morbid tendency by a vigorous will, as Pascal and Tennyson and Haw-

thorne overcame theirs, (at least in part,) we cannot say. We are not Poe's judges. We are his grateful readers and students.

He was born in Boston, the second son of a third-rate actor of a good Baltimore family and bad personal habits. The mother was a lovable, gay, delicate and pitiful young actress. The poor little girl was deserted by her husband and died of consumption in a Richmond inn, in 1811, leaving her eldest son with relatives in Baltimore, and her second son, Edgar, and a baby girl, absolutely penniless and helpless in the dingy tavern. But the children were not left friendless by the warm-hearted Virginians. Rosalie was adopted by an excellent family named Mackenzie. Edgar was taken into the home of John Allan, Esq., a reputable merchant, whose romantic young wife was always a tender mother to the bright-eyed, talented, wayward boy.

The house of which young Poe became an in-

mate was not "a princely Southern Mansion;" but it was a very comfortable brick dwelling, with plenty of servants and lots of food and drink. Mr. Allan had his ups and downs in business, (and in morals;) but upon the whole he was a prosperous and respected citizen, generous in his way of living, though inclined to be close in the matter of money allowances and very set upon having his own way in everything. Doubtless his mental obduracy was in part to blame for the quarrels which often arose between him and young Edgar and finally drove them violently asunder, with tragic consequences. But not more than half the fault was Mr. Allan's; the other half was Poe's.

The boy could have had a fine start in life if he had been willing or able to take it. It is true that he was never formally adopted by Mr. Allan. But he was treated as a foster-child; well housed and fed and clothed; petted by the wealthy *bourgeoisie* of Richmond as heir pre-

sumptive to a considerable fortune; educated by clever teachers and for a time at a private school in England; and then sent to the University of Virginia, with good clothes and a small supply of cash. There he made a decent rank in his studies, a decided reputation by his eloquence, a sensation by his eccentric personal pride and his habit of occasional desperate drinking, and a sudden end of his university career by reckless gambling.

Coming home to Richmond and quarreling with his foster-father, who declined to pay all these gambling debts, Poe ran away at eighteen years of age. He went to his birthplace, Boston, where he somehow managed to publish a small volume of incoherent verse entitled *Tamerlane and Other Poems, by a Bostonian.* He then enlisted in the army as a private soldier, and served with credit for nearly two years, rising to the rank of sergeant-major.

Then came the death of his dear foster-

mother at Richmond, and a partial reconciliation with his foster-father, John Allan. Through his assistance, Poe was admitted, at the age of twenty-one, as a cadet in the Military Academy at West Point. Meantime he had printed, in Baltimore, another booklet of verselets called *Al Aaraaf*, and had renewed relations with some of his father's family, particularly with Mrs. Clemm, his aunt, who afterward became his mother-in-law and the good angel of his life.

His career at West Point lasted about seven months. Then he got himself expelled, (purposely, I think,) for insubordination; and went to New York, and published a third slim book of poetry. His classmates at the Military Academy who had subscribed for it were disappointed because it did not contain the brilliant squibs and satires which they had heard him recite while he was with them. But it held something far better: three or four lyrics,—*Israfel*,

The City in the Sea, The Sleeper, To Helen,—which revealed Poe's gift of the immortal music.

Read his best poem.

"Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicæan barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

"On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece
And the grandeur that was Rome.

"Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche,
How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!
Ah, Psyche from the regions which
Are Holy Land!"

Poe never did better than this. Indeed few men have ever done as well with a little lyric of love,—fanciful, fragrant, musical, remote.

His life from 1831 to 1833 was obscure. He was probably in Baltimore most of the time.

His former benefactor, Mr. Allan, had married again, and between him and Poe there had come an absolute and final quarrel. Poe's experiences at this time included a futile love-affair with a Baltimore girl; bitter poverty from which he tried to escape at intervals in the delirium of drunkenness; periods of intense work in which he produced his first stories of fantasy and horror; a prize of a hundred dollars won by one of these stories, ("The Manuscript Found in a Bottle,") in a newspaper competition; an appointment as editor of a monthly magazine, *The Southern Literary Messenger*, at a salary of ten dollars a week; and finally a strange love, but undoubtedly deep and true, for his little cousin, Virginia Clemm, a sweet and delicate girl, whom he married, with her mother's approval, in 1835 when the child was just thirteen years old.

These two women, the one giving him an affection that was motherly, the other a love that must have been childlike, now entered insepa-

rably into Poe's life,—the life of a wandering editor, a hack-writer, a desperate toiler, an Aladdin of impossible dreams, a poor proud gentleman, a fighter against the world, and at intervals an abject and crazy slave of drink and drugs. How well these women loved him, and how much he made them suffer, God knows. But he was loyal to them in his way,—incredibly and chivalrously loyal. The one thing that he could not do for them was to master himself.

He made a success of the *Messenger*. His prose tales, with their odd subjects and intensely vivid style, began to attract attention. He had warm and powerful friends. But his spasmodic passion for drink lost him their confidence and finally his place as editor. In 1838 he went to Philadelphia; made new friends; became a contributor, and afterward the editor, of *Graham's Magazine;* produced his brilliant short stories, *The Gold Bug, The Fall of the House of Usher, William Wilson, The Pit and the Pendulum,*

The Black Cat, and a score of others; made innumerable plans for new magazines and journals which were to bring him vast wealth; wrote such poems as *The Haunted Palace, The Conqueror Worm, To One in Paradise;* drank sullenly when the fit seized him; quarreled with most of his friends; and went to New York in 1844, penniless.

The first year in New York was hard and miserable; black care at home, for his beloved child-wife was desperately ill; broken and unhappy work, for the wolf was at the door and must be fought off every day. Then came suddenly the *annus mirabilis* of Poe's life. His poem of *The Raven* appeared [in *The Evening Mirror*] in January, 1845. It floated into fame as suddenly as the bird itself had entered the poet's door. But instead of casting a "shadow on the floor," it threw upon him a brilliant light of popularity. He became a social lion. Literary women ran after him. He was in request as

a reader and lecturer. His collected poems were published. He became editor and proprietor of *The Broadway Journal.* A new edition of his "*Tales*" was brought out by one of the best publishers. He was praised and pirated in England; translated and celebrated by the school of Théophile Gautier in France.

Then, in the dawn of success, fell the great disaster. Out of the dark cloud of his wife's illness came the lightning-stroke of her death, January 30, 1847. He was still very poor, ill and unnerved. Her loss affected him deeply. But there was little hope that he could gather strength enough to make this sorrow the source of a new and nobler life.

On the contrary it seemed to disorganize his powers, while it intensified their separate activities. His melodic sense poured itself into the weird chantings of *Ulalume* and the jingling artifice of *The Bells.* His philosophic notions expanded into the fantastic cloud-palace of *Eu-*

reka, an absurd explanation of the Secret of the Universe. He lectured on *The Poetic Principle*, at Lowell, at Providence, at New York. He plunged or drifted into a series of sentimental adventures in which he appeared to be passionately in love with several ladies at the same time. To one of them he was engaged. The engagement was broken because he could not stay sober. He protested bitterly against giving her up, and at the same time wrote impassioned letters and poems to another lady. Finally he went to his old Richmond home, drank hard at intervals, and renewed acquaintance with another lady with whom he had been in love as a boy and who had meantime become a widow. He obtained her promise to marry him. Incidentally he joined a total abstinence society. Then he went to Baltimore to get ready for the wedding.

What happened to the unfortunate man there will never be known. He disappeared into the yellow, fuming fog of alcohol. Six days after

his departure from Richmond he was found in a stupor in a vile den of Baltimore, where the lowest politicians kept the poor wretches whom they drugged and dragged around to vote. He was carried to the hospital and nursed. But he only roused from his stupor to rave, and once to cry, "My best friend would be he who would take a pistol and blow these d——d wretched brains out." On Sunday morning he became more quiet; slept a little; then murmured, "Lord help my poor soul;" and so expired.

"The lingering illness
Is over at last—
And the fever called 'Living'
Is conquered at last."

Out of such a life, a "fever" indeed, abnormal in its rhythm; separate from the real world in the solitude of its deliriums; intense, irregular, incoherent; in fancy, royal and heroic; in fact, dull as a poor man's sick-bed; limited in ex-

perience and intellectual comradeship, extravagant in pretension, wild in bravado, obsessed by one mania, to defy, startle, and conquer the philistines,—out of such a life what lasting literature could come? None, say the classicists, in the severity of their conviction. But the classicists are wrong. The facts are against them.

Poe's short stories live because they are real stories, distinct, complete, interesting, memorable. But they are not in any sense stories of reality, nor realistic stories; the germ of each one of them is a morbid idea, an illusion, an abnormal passion, a mystery, or an intellectual puzzle. This germ is isolated in the author's mind. He concentrates his intellectual powers, his logical intensity, his visionary magic, his inimitable style upon this single subject. He works it out in a form of absolute inward consistency and total detachment from the actual world. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* has no more of the atmosphere of Paris than *The Gold Bug*

has of the air of South Carolina. In *The Black Cat*, the details which account for the appearance of the feline image in the plaster of the wall are absurdly incredible. *The Assignation* is no more Venetian that *Metzengerstein* is Hungarian, or than *A Tale of the Ragged Mountains* is Virginian. Of real local color in these stories there is little or nothing. What takes the place of it is an amazing thoroughness of psychological tone. The gray terror, the red hatred, the pallid, hectic love, the black despair are carried through to the last touch. So perfect is the method, that if you but yield to its enchantment and shut your eyes to the outward world, the stories become as convincing as nightmares.

The quasi-humorous tales, extravaganzas and burlesques, like *Bon-Bon, The Duc de l'Omelette, Three Sundays in a Week* and *The Spectacles*, are not at all funny but very ridiculous. They have the shrill, sustained note of half-hys-

teric gaiety. One is inclined to wonder whether anybody ever smiled at them.

The puzzle-solving tales, *The Gold Bug*, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, *The Purloined Letter*, are remarkable *tours de force* of ingenuity. As detective-stories they may not have been the earliest, but they were certainly the best, forerunners of a favorite modern type of fiction. M. Dupin is more credible, as he is delightfully more brief, than Sherlock Holmes.

The tales of perversity and terror which form the greater part of Poe's fiction are extraordinary in the singleness, the intensity, the narrowness of their effect. They do not touch our pity, our compassion, our awe. They are aimed directly at some mysterious fear. And they play upon that sense with terrible artistry. They do not make us weep; they make us shiver,—and shut the door into the darkness behind us.

There is little normal psychology in them,

except perhaps in that analysis which Poe gives of the spirit of Perverseness. "I am not more sure," he says in *The Black Cat*, "that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action for no other reason than because he knows he should *not?* Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is *Law*, merely because we understand it to be such?" This theme he works out more fully in a little story of fear, *The Imp of the Perverse.* The idea runs through many of his tales, like *Berenice*, *Ligeia*, *Morella*, *William Wilson.* In each of them the hero has the lunatic consistency of a perverted mind. The terror of *The House of Usher* is no less insane, but in that story it is fatality rather than perversity that creates the chilling shadow. The terror of *The Pit and the Pendulum* is simply physical, a sheer shuddering of the flesh.

Like Byron's narrative poems, Poe's stories have no real character-drawing in them. The only male actor is the author himself in various disguises and moods. The women are statues, angels, or ghosts. Hence the stories are free from the slightest trace of lubricity. There is nothing in their descriptions of love or luxury, of dissipation or crime, to enkindle the warmth of sympathetic passion in the reader's mind. They are little masterpieces of intellectual ingenuity, or of morbid terror worked out to the last touch of art, in a style which is perfectly adapted to the effect which they were intended to produce. There is nothing in them to which the moralist could object, except their total lack of ethical meaning.

There is one story, however, in which this criticism does not hold. *William Wilson* is the most human, the most significant, therefore the most really interesting of Poe's tales. It actually contains some excellent local color in the

reminiscences of his own school-days in England. It is a mystical story of the struggle between a man's higher and his lower nature. The author, who tells the tale in the first person, has been followed through boyhood and youth by a certain William Wilson, his namesake and rival, who rebukes his pride, corrects his faults, endeavors to restrain his evil impulses, betrays his card-sharping at Oxford, thwarts his ambition at Rome, his revenge at Paris, his passionate love at Naples, his avarice in Egypt, and through it all, though hated and resisted, manages to dominate and control him. At last, in an Italian masquerade, the author is driven to fury by the inopportune appearance of this nobler double, and resolves to fight with him.

"In an absolute frenzy of wrath I turned at once upon him . . . and seized him violently by the collar. He was attired, as I had expected, in a costume altogether similar to my own: wearing a Spanish cloak of blue velvet,

begirt about the waist with a crimson belt sustaining a rapier. A mask of black silk entirely covered his face.

" 'Scoundrel!' I said, . . . 'you *shall not* dog me unto death! Follow me, or I stab you where you stand!'—and I broke my way . . . into a small ante-chamber, . . . dragging him . . . with me.

"Upon entering, I thrust him furiously from me. He staggered against the wall, while I closed the door, with an oath, and commanded him to draw. He hesitated but for an instant; then, with a slight sigh, drew in silence, and put himself upon his defence.

"The contest was brief indeed. I was frantic. . . . In a few seconds I forced him by sheer strength against the wainscoting, and thus getting him at my mercy, plunged my sword with brute ferocity repeatedly through and through his bosom.

"At that instant some one tried the latch of

the door. I hastened to prevent an intrusion and then immediately returned to my dying antagonist. . . . The brief moment in which I averted my eyes had been sufficient to produce apparently a material change in the arrangement at the farther end of the room. A large mirror—so at first it seemed to me in my confusion—now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait.

"Thus it appeared, I say, but was not. It was my antagonist, . . . Wilson, who then stood before me in the agonies of his dissolution. His mask and cloak lay, where he had thrown them, upon the floor. Not a thread in all his raiment, not a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of his face, which was not, even in the most absolute identity, *mine own!*

"It was Wilson: but he spoke no longer in a

whisper, and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said:

" '*You have conquered and I yield. Yet, henceforward art thou also dead—dead to the World, to Heaven, and to Hope! In me thou didst exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself.*' "

Poe's verse is much less in quantity, and if I am not mistaken, less absolute in quality than his prose. There are hardly more than a dozen poems which need to be considered from a literary point of view. The others are too feeble in meaning or too faulty in form to have an enduring life.

Among the finer lyrics of Poe, I should not put the famous *Raven* first. In spite of its extraordinary metrical harmonies there is something conventional about it, a tone of melodrama, an atmosphere of the *appartement meublé* in its purple silken curtains, its velvet violet cushions, its tufted carpet over which the feet of

seraphim (strangely enough) "tinkle," and its bust of Pallas "above the chamber door," from the top of which the raven quite unaccountably continues to cast "his shadow on the floor." Nor should I give the first rank to the artificial tintinnabulations of *The Bells*, beloved by wandering elocutionists. I should put first of all that little lyric *To Helen*, which I have already quoted, with its *curiosa felicitas;* then a few poems of mystery, love, and sorrow, like *The Haunted Palace, The Conqueror Worm, To One in Paradise, Ulalume, For Annie, Annabel Lee,* —all of them marked by repetitions and recurrent rhymes, vague and misty images, inarticulate cadences of beauty, long vowels and liquid consonants,—would illustrate his mastery of *morbidezza* in verse. At the end, as a sort of picture of the poet's life I should put the ballad called *Eldorado.*

Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,

Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old,
This knight so bold,
And o'er his heart a shadow
Fell, as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

And as his strength
Failed him at length,
He met a pilgrim shadow—
"Shadow," said he,
"Where can it be—
"This land of Eldorado?"

"Over the Mountains
"Of the Moon,
"Down the Valley of the Shadow,
"Ride, boldly ride,"
The shade replied—
"If you seek for Eldorado."

Here then we leave him, broken dreamer, shadowed heart, knight who never fulfilled his quest. The little good work that he left has

something in it, an intensity of mood, an exquisiteness of finish, which marks it with a quality all his own. But there is nothing large and noble in significance, nothing sustained and virile in purpose and execution, nothing that vitally expresses the spirit of America, and little that is in touch with the sanities and realities of life anywhere. It is for these reasons that America does not accept Poe as her greatest poet. She regards him with admiration; but not as a supreme artist of life, a master singer: only as an incomparable carver of grotesques and arabesques in ivory and ebony.

LIGHTS IN POETRY

III

A GREATER COMET

A GREATER COMET

IT made a sensation like the appearance of a comet, a great coruscating comet, when certain British critics discovered Walt Whitman as "the real thing" in American poetry. It came to these critics as a great relief. They had been long expecting, not to say demanding, something of this kind from the New World,—something vast, tumultuous, and irregular, something which would defy all rules and traditions, something primitive and lawless. When it arrived, in the selection of *Poems by Walt Whitman*, edited by W. M. Rossetti in 1868, many a jaded æsthetic person in Oxford and in London felt a serene sense of comfort, and laid him down in peace to sleep. For the desired event had happened. The

new democracy had given birth to its flamboyant bard. Did not Whitman himself say so?

"I too am not a bit tamed—I too am untranslatable;
"I sound my barbaric yawp over roofs of the world."

But the American people, curiously enough, were not captivated. They perversely went on reading Emerson and Longfellow and Whittier and Lowell. Whitman was neglected for a score of years, except by two classes of people: the orthodox reviewers who were shocked at the crude physical abandon of some of his pieces and warned the public not to read him; and a small band of ardent admirers who found in him a new doctrine of life and hailed him as the first genuine American poet and one of the greatest of the world. Out of the conflict between these two parties grew, in time, an amazing literature of partizanship. The Whitman traditions developed into a Whitman myth. The stringent condemnation of the moralists pro-

duced, on the opposite side, a kind of adoration which can only be described as Whitmania.

But the books of Whitman himself did not reach the democracy to which they were addressed. He was much written about and comparatively little read.

The first thing that strikes us, then, in regard to Whitman, is his strange fortune in missing the audience that he desired and finding one that he disowned. He said of his poems:

"For you these, from me, O Democracy, to serve you, *ma femme!*"

But this perverse *femme* would have none of him. His ardent readers were the bookmen, the cultivated persons whom he somewhat contemptuously called "the scholar swells."

What was the reason of this? Why has the poetry of Whitman failed hitherto to reach and charm the plain people of America? Why has it succeeded, in its best passages, in giving a real and rare pleasure to a comparatively

small circle of academic readers? Why does the body of it still remain a theme for commentary and violent controversy? These are the questions which a serious and impartial criticism must discuss.

First of all then, let us try to get the figure of the man before us as he really was, without legendary embellishments. Whitman was born in 1819. Like Whittier, he was a comfortable farmer's son, a happy barefoot boy. He went to the village school, and while still in his teens, began to earn his living, first in a printing office and then as a country school-teacher. Like Whittier also, Whitman began his public career as a newspaper editor, and was a fluent writer of contributions in verse and prose to various journals and magazines, all of which juvenilia were crude, conventional, and negligible. He expressed his own opinion of his early verselets by reprinting a few of them among his "Prose Works."

But these two writers who started in life under the same conditions, were of opposite temperaments and followed diverging paths. Whittier was a New Englander. Strict, earnest, orderly, he took life with an intense gravity and threw himself strenuously into the moral conflicts of the day. Whitman was a Long Islander, of half Dutch ancestry, and by choice a child of the big, cosmopolitan city of New York, into which he drifted by natural attraction. He took life easily, not to say carelessly, rambling to and fro', seeing all that Manhattan had to show him, floating away for refreshment on long strolls through the country, a good-natured *flâneur*. On Broadway he was externally quite as conventional as his neighbors, wearing a tall silk hat and carrying a small cane, with a *boutonnière* in the lapel of his black frock-coat. He tried several newspapers. In 1848 he resigned the editorship of the *Brooklyn Eagle* and went off with his brother Jeff on

a roundabout tour to New Orleans, crossing the Alleghany mountains, boating down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, and returning, after some months, by way of Chicago, the Great Lakes, and Niagara.

This random journey seems to have been the turning-point of his career. A new plan and purpose take possession of him. The high hat and the black coat disappear from his wardrobe and from his character. He goes to work with his father at carpentering and house-building; tries a little lecturing; and in 1855, being thirty-seven years old, he sets up partly with his own hands and publishes at his own expense, a book called *Leaves of Grass*, in which his message as a bard is finally delivered to the world.

I say finally, because there was a kind of finality about the appearance of this famous book. All the remainder of his life was in effect a commentary and advertisement for it. He revised it, added to it, reshaped it, expanded it, found

different publishers for it. His other books, *Drum Taps, Democratic Vistas, November Boughs,* and so on, were but annexes to *Leaves of Grass.* He wrote reviews and notices praising the book and had them printed anonymously in newspapers and magazines. The frontispiece of the first edition was a portrait of the author wearing a soft felt hat and flannel shirt open at the neck. This became his official costume, quite as deliberate and symbolic in its way as the rolling collar of Byron, or the velvet waistcoat and gold chain of Disraeli. Whitman assumed with this book his life-long attitude, which was, as he says, "to exploit my own physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, and æsthetic personality, . . . identified with place and date, in a far more candid and comprehensive sense than any hitherto poem or book."

The particular mark, the distinguishing quality of that personality was definitely chosen. It was that of a joyful and irresponsible "caresser

of life," a friendly vagrant "going forth, seeing all the beautiful perfect things," and finding them all equally beautiful. The keynote of the message was clearly and loudly struck in the first words of the *Song of Myself*—

"I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease, observing a spear of summer grass."

The notable exception to this loafing and observant attitude was in the service which Whitman rendered from 1863 to 1865, as a volunteer nurse to the sick and wounded soldiers in the military hospitals during the Civil War. This was a noble and generous service, conceived in the spirit of true comradeship, and rendered with a warm, humane sympathy. It won for him the name of "the good gray poet." Out of these years there came undoubtedly his

best verses,—the two noble elegies on Lincoln, *Pioneers! O Pioneers!*, *Ethiopia Saluting the Colors*, and a few others.

Then followed a period of desultory clerkship in the Indian Bureau and the Attorney General's office at Washington, during which time the controversy over the morality or immorality of *Leaves of Grass* blazed fiercely, and the British critics discovered Whitman in the blaze. In 1873 he had a stroke of partial paralysis and left Washington for good, finally making his home in the town of Camden, New Jersey. Here he lived for nearly twenty years in retired publicity, revising his poems, writing a few new ones; making prose comments on himself and his contemporaries; loafing picturesquely; ministered and contributed to by a little circle of adorers; laying up money in the bank, and building for himself a $4,000 tomb in the cemetery where he was buried in 1892.

The most significant action in this life of

three-score years and twelve was Whitman's fine service in the hospitals: the most striking feature was his indomitable confidence in his *Leaves of Grass.*

It is not necessary to pry into the corners and blank intervals of his career. When he writes a letter to an English admirer about the six unacknowledged children with whom "circumstances have separated me from intimate relations," it is not important to know whether he was confessing, like Rousseau, or merely boasting and dreaming. Nor need we enquire too closely into the actual state of his finances when he borrowed or accepted money from needy friends. He was in many ways a secretive person, though in others amazingly unreserved, but he was as ready to give as to receive.

The thing that emerges distinctly from a comparison of his life with his writings is the contrast between his large declamatory expression and his slight practical performance in the

energetic, strenuous, laborious world of Democracy. He was not really, except for brief intervals, an efficient part of that world. He was not one of the rough-handed pioneers, the sturdy farmers, the self-reliant and industrious artizans, the home-builders, the hard-working people of rather idealistic sentiments who have made the United States. He was an æolian harp for the winds of sensation to play upon; a mirror of passing scenes and impressions; a big romantic, riding on top of an omnibus and talking to the driver; a kindly tramp with a genius for vivid phrases. And precisely because he was this, he became one of the best recorders of American scenes, and one of the poorest interpreters of the American spirit.

Another barrier between Whitman and the plain people for whom he wished to write, was his wilful disregard of physical modesty in a small but very noticeable portion of his early work. The Americans were the less likely to

overlook his offense in this respect, precisely because a young people working out their civilization in a rough and new world, living in log-cabins or small farm-houses, feel their need of the decencies and proprieties of life so strongly, that they are willing to pay almost any price for them. Those people did not like Whitman, they would have refused him even if he had been twice the poet that he was, because he insisted upon talking about things which did not seem to them fit subjects for general conversation. Whitman was not immoral, but at times he was indecent.

It is difficult to criticize in detail the pieces which raised this objection without falling into the same offense. If, as most thoughtful people have always believed, there are in human society certain *tacenda*, subjects not adapted for public conversation, then the same rule applies to the critic as to the artist,—a rule which the censorious moralist does not always remember.

Whitman's fundamental error was not a vicious purpose. It was a theory that physical modesty is an absurd and rather harmful conventionality. He proclaimed:

"Of physiology from top to toe I sing."

He held not only the equivalence of the body to the soul, but also the equality of all the members of the body, a view that has been discarded by every human tribe which has emerged from barbarism. He called ecstatically to his fellow-citizens:

"Undrape! you are not guilty to me, nor stale, nor discarded."

But this was precisely what his fellow-citizens did not wish to do. Whatever they might think about the nude in art, they objected to "undraping" in public. Whatever they might excuse in the jovial coarseness of writers who reflected the manners of ruder ages, they did not like to hear a modern poet sing of unfit-

ting themes with a solemnity which made them more disagreeable. Rightly or wrongly, they were disinclined to sacrifice their instincts of propriety to Mr. Whitman's theory of costume. The poems which embodied this theory were few. But they were strong and unmistakable. And their penetrating flavor, so long as it remained in the volume, made the normal and average American unwilling to accept the unabridged *Leaves of Grass* as a household book of poetry.

So much, then, for the reasons why Whitman has actually failed to become what he hoped to be, the chosen poet of the common people of his own country. Eliminating these factors of romantic weakness and false immodesty, what remains for us to consider in his work? A great deal that is interesting; somewhat that is striking and powerful; and a little that is splendid poetry,—splendid as a comet.

Whitman is one of the most remarkable examples in modern times of a poet who is a

preacher. Not Wordsworth, nor Châteaubriand, nor Victor Hugo, insisted more strongly upon having a message to deliver to the world. The text of Whitman's sermon is taken from Emerson,—"the infinitude of the private man." But he adds to it two other topics which Emerson would not have fully sanctioned,—the equivalence of all private men, and the divinity of the crowd.

"One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse."

. . . . . .

"Only what proves itself to every man and woman
is so,
Only what nobody denies is so."

He carries the doctrine of Transcendentalism to an extreme, exhorts us to forsake all traditions and welcome all impressions, to lay aside the teaching and rules of the past, to wash the gum from our eyes and take the open road with him.

"What is known I strip away,
I launch all men and women forward with me into the Unknown."

Now it is evident that a doctrine of this kind, if sincerely followed by a man of natural power, will produce an original and vivid kind of writing. Whitman had both the sincerity and the power, and there are elements of extraordinary vitality and passages of brilliant impressionism in his work. Take for example the poem called *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*, with its large vision of the crowded, hurrying human tides; or read the wonderful song of the mocking-bird, in *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking;* or the night-scene from the *Song of Myself:*

"I am he that walks with the tender and growing night,
I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.

. . . . . .

Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunset,—earth of the mountains misty-topped!

Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!
Far-swooping, elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth!
Smile, for your lover comes!"

This is certainly a good example of what is called "word-painting," done with a large brush, swiftly, with broad strokes. But the difficulty with Whitman's doctrine is that it leads him to admit no difference among his sensations and impressions. Since they all belong to him, the infinite individual, he records them all. He hurls them at us in immense chunks, conglomerate, inarticulate, interminable.

Take a few lines from the same piece which I have just quoted.

"I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,
And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree-toad is a chef-d'œuvre for the highest,

And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors
of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn
all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depressed head surpasses
any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions
of infidels,
And I could come every afternoon of my life to look
at the farmer's girl boiling her iron tea-kettle
and baking her short-cake;
I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss,
fruits, grains, esculent roots
And am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over."

It is an abuse of language to call this poetry. It is a statement of doubtful facts in semi-intoxicated prose. I have seen a man who was tattooed all over with quadrupeds and birds. But to be "*stuccoed* all over" with them is assuredly a little too much for even a poet to survive.

All through the mass of Whitman's work we find the same element of incongruity, the same disorderly fancy, the inability to distinguish sense from nonsense,—as if the nerves of taste

were absent or blunted. A line of graphic and memorable beauty is followed by paragraphs of banality and insignificance. Take the opening verses of his dithyrambic on the grass:

"A child said, *What is the grass?* fetching it to me
with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what
it is, any more than he.
I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of
hopeful green stuff woven.
Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners,
that we may see and remark, and say, *Whose?*
Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced
babe of the vegetation.
Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic;
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and in
narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white;
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them
the same, I receive them the same."

Just what this uniform meaning is, with its absurd lingo of "Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff," who can tell? But about the hand-

kerchief of the Lord, with its scent and its embroidered initials, there can be no doubt. It is perfectly plain, and quite intolerable. Yet immediately after this balderdash comes the striking line about the grass:

"And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves."

It is possible, of course, to justify and extol this incoherence and indiscriminateness of Whitman's verse,—this *mélange* of scattered traits of beauty in a mass of insignificant and ugly stuff,—as an exact reflection of the mixed world of phenomena in which we live. But to call this confused mixture "poetry," implies the acceptance of an extreme doctrine of naturalism in art. And, in fact, this is precisely the explanation of Whitman. The bulk of his work is an exposition and illustration of this doctrine; and, like most expositions, it is not poetical. If the function of art is merely to imitate, to

reproduce the natural world, without selection, without symmetry, then his poetry is all great. But if the function of art is to interpret, to clarify, to simplify and to intensify the significant by omission of the insignificant,—in short, to distil the finer essence of life in the alembic of man's spirit,—then Whitman is great only in those rare poems where he escapes from his own theory, and sings of noble grounds for noble emotions.

The same thing, exactly, is true of the form of his verse. He adopted a new theory of poetics, half-true, half-false; carried it to an extreme; and conscientiously cast a great part of his work into a shape which makes it difficult to read with pleasure and impossible to remember with profit. It is only when his genius breaks away from its self-imposed bondage, forgets its own dogmatic rules, and sings naturally with a metre and cadence which are new and musical, that he succeeds in giving us great

poems. It is when he is least the innovator he thought himself, that he is most the poet we admire.

Whitman's chosen form of verse,—unrhymed, unmeasured lines, following each other without perceptible laws of structure,—was not original with him. Macpherson had used it in his once famous *Poems of Ossian*, which Whitman studied closely. Blake had used it in his dithyrambic *Prophetic Books*. But there were other examples, more modern and nearer at hand. Martin Farquhar Tupper had written an immensely popular book, called *Proverbial Philosophy*, in which precisely this declamatory and grandiose style was used to express the most commonplace ideas. Samuel Warren, a British novelist, had published a lyrical soliloquy, called *The Lily and the Bee*, in which the same irregularities, eccentricities, cacophonies, and explosive ecstasies appeared. It was an ode in commemoration of the Crystal Palace,

WALT WHITMAN.

From the painting by J. W. Alexander in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

written in London in 1851, four years before *Leaves of Grass*. Parts of it read like a literal prophecy of Whitman.

"A unit unperceived
I sink into the living stream again!
Naves, transepts, aisles and galleries,
Pacing untired: insatiate!
Touchstone of character! capacity! and knowledge!
Spectacle, now lost in the spectators: then spectators
in the spectacle!
Rich: poor: gentle: simple: wise: foolish: young:
old: learned: ignorant: thoughtful: thoughtless:
haughty: humble: frivolous: profound!

. . . . . .

Now he is speaking with brother engineers—English,
French, German, Russian,—showing the
Hydraulic Press, which raised to the height
of a hundred feet huge tubes of iron two
thousand tons in weight: now the French
turbine: the centrifugal pump: the steam-hauler—
oh, mighty Steam!
Here behold Power!
Exact: docile: delicate: tremendous in operation:
dealing, easily, alike with filmy gossamer lace,
silk, flax, hemp, cotton, granite, iron!"

It would be easy to imagine that this was

Whitman himself in one of his most didactic moods, strolling through the Crystal Palace. Or one might think that Warren had come to New York to walk down Broadway with Whitman while he was expatiating as follows in the

SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD.

"You flagged walks of the cities! You strong curbs at the edges!
You ferries! You planks and posts of wharves! You timber-lined sides! You distant ships!
You rows of houses! You window-pierced façades! You roofs!
You porches and entrances! You copings and iron guards!
You windows whose transparent shells might expose so much!
You doors and ascending steps! You arches!"

It is evident that there is no internal law or principle of order in this kind of writing. It is not merely irregular, it is agglutinative, and there is no limit to the extent to which it may be carried. Here it goes:

"You lamp-posts, trim and erect! You gutters, humble but necessary!
You locks on doors! You mysterious curtains behind the windows! You shutters!
You solemn omnibusses, push-carts, beer-wagons, hearses!
You agile taxi-cabs!
You letter-boxes painted green, silent and confidential!
You open-faced shops, frankly displaying your goods: ribbons, shoes, books, candy, pistols, coffins, glittering eyes of jewels and green coiffures of vegetables!
You hydrants waiting impassive on the street-corners to gurgitate floods of water!
You are all parts of me, imperturbe and communicative!
I also rumble as an omnibus or dart as a taxi-cab!
I am a hydrant of verses gushing from the reservoir of nature."

Whitman's revolt against the tyranny of accepted metrical forms undoubtedly led him into a region of poetic anarchy. Much of his work may be saved by its occasional vividness of phrase, and by its general vigor of spirit, from the oblivion which covers the once popular *Pro-*

verbial Philosophy of the feeble Tupper. But it will survive, like the *Poems of Ossian*, more as a curiosity for the learned than as a delight for mankind. For the plain man, the normal human reader, seeks and loves in poetry something which will help him out of life's confusion,—a clarity of vision, a symmetry of form, an unmistakable music of words and metres. These are found in Whitman sometimes, but only in those poems which unconsciously approach most nearly to the poetic forms that he professed to have thrown off.

Pioneers! O Pioneers! is an example of this revenge which his genius took upon his theory. It has a definite structure of stanzas, a regular refrain, a measurable rhythm and cadence. *Ethiopia Saluting the Colors* is a still more striking illustration. I quote it because it is too little known.

"Who are you, dusky woman, so ancient, hardly human,

With your woolly-white and turban'd head, and bare
bony feet?
Why, rising by the roadside here, do you the colors
greet?

('Tis while our army lines Carolina's sands and pines,
Forth from thy hovel door, thou, Ethiopia com'st to
me,
As under doughty Sherman, I march toward the sea.)

*Me, master, years a hundred, since from my parents
sunder'd,*
*A little child, they caught me as the savage beast is
caught;*
*Then hither me, across the sea, the cruel slaver
brought.*

No further does she say, but lingering all the day,
Her high-borne turban'd head she wags, and rolls her
darkling eye,
And curtseys to the regiments, the guidons moving
by.

What is it, fateful woman, so blear, hardly human?
Why wag your head, with turban bound, yellow, red
and green?
Are the things so strange and marvellous, you see or
have seen?"

There are three real services, it seems to me,

which Whitman has rendered to poetry in America.

First, he has undoubtedly enlarged the range of metrical forms. His experiments have shown that there is a real realm of verse outside the strict limit of long metre, common metre, and short metre. This is a distinct benefit, by which coming poets will profit in the freedom and variety of their music, provided they remember that nothing is musical which has not the elements of time and tone. Here is an illustration of what I mean.

"Whispers of heavenly death, murmur'd I hear;
Labial gossip of night, sibilant chorals;
Footsteps gently ascending, mystical breezes, wafted soft and low;
Ripples of unseen rivers, tides of a current, flowing, forever flowing;
(Or is it the plashing of tears? the measureless waters of human tears?)

I see, just see, skyward, great cloud-masses;
Mournfully, slowly they roll, silently swelling and mixing;

**With at times, a half-dimm'd, sadden'd, far-off star,
Appearing and disappearing.**

**(Some parturition, rather, some solemn, immortal birth:
On the frontiers, to eyes impenetrable,
Some Soul is passing over.)"**

Second, Whitman has expressed perhaps better than any other American the gladness of spirit which belongs to one "standing at ease in Nature," rejoicing in her splendid pageant, and drawing long, deep breaths of her open air. This is commonly called a pagan spirit. But when I consider its first appearance in the Book of Job and in the Psalms, and its most perfect utterance in the Gospels, I am more inclined to call it Christian. It belongs to the true experience of the simple life. Here is an illustration:

TO THE MAN-OF-WAR BIRD

**"Thou who hast slept all night upon the storm,
Waking renew'd on thy prodigious pinions,**

. . . . . .

Now a blue point, far, far in heaven floating,
As to the light emerging here on deck I watch thee,
(Myself a speck, a point on the world's floating vast).

Far, far at sea,
After the night's fierce drifts have strewn the shore with wrecks,
With reappearing day as now so happy and serene,
The rosy and elastic dawn, the flashing sun,
The limpid spread of air cerulean,
Thou also reappearest.

Thou born to match the gale, (thou art all wings),
To cope with heaven and earth and sea and hurricane,
Thou ship of air that never furl'st thy sails,
Days, even weeks untired and onward, through spaces, realms gyrating,
At dusk that look'st on Senegal, at morn America,
That sport'st amid the lightning-flash and thunder-cloud,
In them, in thy experience, had'st thou my soul,
What joys! what joys were thine!"

Third, Whitman has touched in some of his poems a very powerful note of patriotism. He often seems to admire his country chiefly because she is big. It is true that he generally ignores the qualities of self-restraint, sobriety, order,

patience, industry, which have developed her strength in the midst of her bigness. It is true that he cannot compare with Emerson, Whittier, or Lowell, nor indeed with some living poets, in the clearness of his hopes and prophecies for America. But though his love is vague and misty, it is strong. Sometimes it blows off in grotesque salutations to his "*camerados*"—a word which he probably thought was Spanish, —or in pyrotechnics about "*Libertad*,"—which is a province in Peru. But these affectations are forgiven and forgotten when we hear the deeper, truer voice of the Spirit of America, as it breathes in Whitman's finest poem, the lament on the death of Lincoln.

"O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
But O heart! heart! heart!

O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

"O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head;
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

"My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip, the victor ship comes in with object won:
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
But I, with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead."

LIGHTS IN POETRY

IV

A DARK LANTERN

A DARK LANTERN

A DARK lantern is a very handy thing, serviceable both in the commission and in the detection of crime. In the stories which have given to *Adventure*, *The Black Mask*, and *The Red Book* their pre-eminence among our magazines of fluent literature, you will find a dark lantern, (or its equivalent an electric torch,) now in the hand of a burglar, now in the hand of a policeman, and sometimes in both. In the latter case the usual result is what astronomical romancers might call a Transit of Mars.

But apart from its service in the popular department of penology, the dark lantern has its uses in the region of original and domestic research. If on the approach of winter you find it necessary to explore the dim and dusty garret in quest of those heavy woolen undergarments which your thoughtful wife has carefully concealed in some camphorated chest,—she can not

remember exactly which chest it is, but she thinks it has three crocheted woolen afghans on top,—you will find a dirigible light of great assistance in your excavations. Or suppose you have gone into the chicken-business without a modern scientific outfit and feel that you must crawl under the barn to see whether your temperamental fowls have not deposited their new-laid eggs, for a couple of weeks past, in that shadowy retreat. As you creep around among the cobwebs you will be thankful for a light even if you find no eggs. Or suppose the rats have formed a eugenic colony in your cellar, or your drainage system is out of order, or your neighbor wishes to show you how he keeps his barrel of cider from turning into vinegar: in all these subterranean expeditions you may well be glad of a dark lantern.

Yes, none but a fool would deny its value in our complicated modern life. It even seems to have had some honor in antiquity, for I suppose

it must have been something of this kind that Diogenes carried in his famous and futile search for an honest man.

Acquit me, then, of any intention to write scornfully or even slightingly of the poetical dark lantern. On the contrary, I mean to praise it for its usefulness, and to acknowledge gratefully the debt which we owe to it for its services! Only when it is acclaimed as a celestial luminary and saluted as a new star in the literary firmament, do I draw the line and withhold my feeble voice from the roaring Hallelujah Chorus.

The first quarter of the twentieth century seems to have been peculiarly subject to this eruption of musical measles. Dr. Cook of Brooklyn discovered the North Pole. George B. Shaw discovered that he was greater than Shakespeare. A new school of confident critics discovered that history and the old masters were preposterous, that we had quite unconsciously created an American Language as a by-prod-

uct of our commercial activity, and that the Great American Novelist and the Great American Poet had emerged from the womb of time, not as twins, but as a numerous litter.

All this was very childlike and natural. The New Era had arrived,—or at least its arrival had been announced by orators, reformers, and advertisers. It was absolutely necessary that we should have a brand-new literature to match it. Therefore, (curiously enough,) writers went back to Boccaccio and Aretino for sex-stuff, and to the Mid-Victorian Tupper and Warren for *vers libre*, and cried, "Here you are! New stars! Hot cakes! Best sellers!" And critics of the school of Wynken, Bunkum and Pod re-echoed, "Here we are! Great stuff! Out with Chaucer, Milton, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Emerson, Longfellow! Welcome Ezra Thump, Harry Hockmeyer, and the divine Lulie Boodle. These are your stars, O Israel!"

Now I would not have you imagine for a mo-

ment that I intend to say, or even to suggest, that the literary activity of the last twenty-five years has produced nothing better than the novelties and inanities so industriously advertised by Messrs. Wynken, Bunkum and Pod. On the contrary it seems to me that a great deal of first-rate work has been done, perhaps even more in America than in England, and certainly as much by women as by men. From the "colyumnists" we have had essays of humor, charm, and wisdom. From the fiction-writers we have had novels and short stories of fine quality and enduring significance. From those who write in verse, especially lyrical verse, we have had fine poetry which deserves to last, if the gods so will. I refrain from giving names lest you should suspect me of being in the "log-rolling" business, which I abhor.

But the point which I wish to make now is that these better things in current literature are not the things most vehemently puffed by the

critics who abound in "prejudices" but have no standards. Their effort seems to be, not to commend a dark lantern for its usefulness, as it deserves, but to bully the world into believing that it is a new star of the first magnitude. I take as an example, and as the subject of this chapter, a book called *Spoon River Anthology*, published in 1915, and supplemented in 1924 by *The New Spoon River*.

That this work was intended to be taken as a contribution to American poetry is evident from the use of the word "anthology," and from the fact that it is printed in broken lines, with a capital letter at the beginning of each line. Further evidence there is none.

Of the author's life I know little more than can be found in the red tome of *Who's Who*, and will say less. He was educated in high school and Knox College, studied law, wrote for newspapers, was married and divorced. I do not doubt that he is an estimable person. His

first step into the limelight of fame was through the waters of *Spoon River*, and that is what I wish to consider; first, because the book has been praised as highly original and American, second because it has been set up as a model for the new poetry.

Understand, if you please, I should be the last to deny the real value of this book as throwing a light upon subterranean and microbic life in the Middle West of America. It is a keen, piercing, ruthless illumination. But it is the light of a dark lantern, not of a new star.

The claim of novelty and absolute originality for *Spoon River* can not be sustained. Read the prelude:

THE HILL

"Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley,
The weak of will, the strong of arm, the clown, the
boozer, the fighter?
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

"One passed in a fever,
One was burned in a mine,

One was killed in a brawl,
One died in a jail,
One fell from a bridge toiling for children and wife—
All, all are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

"Where are Ella, Kate, Mag, Lizzie and Edith,
The tender heart, the simple soul, the loud, the proud,
the happy one?—
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

"One died in shameful child-birth,
One of a thwarted love,
One at the hands of a brute in a brothel,
One of a broken pride, in the search for heart's desire,
One, after life in far-away London and Paris,
Was brought to her little space by Ella and Kate and
Mag—
All, all are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill."

Now read Charles Lamb's lovely poem, written in 1798:

THE OLD FAMILIAR FACES

"I have had playmates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful schooldays;
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies;
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

. . . . . .

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother,
Why wert not thou born in my father's dwelling?
So might we talk of the old familiar faces—

How some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me; all are departed;
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."

Consider now the ground plan of *Spoon River Anthology*. It is supposed to be a collection of imaginary epitaphs for the graveyard of that village. Compare it with the record of burials in *The Parish Register*, written by George Crabbe in England, 1807. Crabbe, who was an anti-romantic, realistic poet, was ahead of the Spoon Riverman in his plan by more than a hundred years, and more than that in the quality of his verse. Read an epitaph from *Spoon River:*

OSCAR HUMMEL

"I staggered on through darkness,
There was a hazy sky, a few stars
Which I followed as best I could.
It was nine o'clock, I was trying to get home.
But somehow I was lost,

Though really keeping the road.
Then I reeled through a gate and into a yard,
And called at the top of my voice:
'Oh, Fiddler! Oh, Mr. Jones!'
(I thought it was his house and he would show me the way home.)
But who should step out but A. D. Blood,
In his night-shirt, waving a stick of wood,
And roaring about the cursed saloons,
And the criminals they made?
'You drunken Oscar Hummel,' he said,
As I stood there weaving to and fro,
Taking the blows from the stick in his hand
Till I dropped down dead at his feet."

Then read a burial record from *The Parish Register:*

With *Andrew Collett,* we the year begin,
The blind, fat landlord of the Old Crown Inn,—
Big as his butt, and, for the self-same use,
To take in stores of strong fermenting juice.
On his huge chair beside the fire he sate,
In revel chief, and umpire in debate;
Each night his string of vulgar tales he told;
When ale was cheap and bachelors were bold;
His heroes all were famous in their days,
Cheats were his boast and drunkards had his praise;
"One, in three draughts, three mugs of ale took down,

"As mugs were then—the champion of the Crown;
"For thrice three days another lived on ale
"And knew no change but that of mild and stale;
"Two thirsty soakers watch'd a vessel's side,
"When he the tap, with dextrous hand, applied;
"Nor from their seats departed, till they found
"That butt was out and heard the mournful sound."
He prais'd the Poacher, precious child of fun!
Who shot the Keeper with his own spring-gun;
Nor less the Smuggler who the Exciseman tied,
And left him hanging at the birchwood side,
There to expire;—but one who saw him hang,
Cut the good cord—a traitor of the gang.
His own exploits with boastful glee he told,
What ponds he empty'd and what pikes he sold;
And how, when blest with sight alert and gay,
The night's amusements kept him through the day.
He sang the praises of those times, when all
"For cards and dice, as for their drink, might call;
"When justice wink'd on every jovial crew,
"And ten-pins tumbled in the Parson's view."
He told, when angry Wives provok'd to rail,
Or drive a third-day drunkard from his ale,
What were his triumphs, and how great the skill
That won the vex'd Virago to his will;
Who raving came;—then talked in milder strain,—
Then wept, then drank, and pledg'd her spouse again.
Such were his themes: how knaves o'er laws prevail,
Or, when made captives, how they fly from jail;
The Young how brave, how subtle were the Old:

And oaths attested all that Folly told.
On death like his what name shall we bestow,
So very sudden! yet so very slow?
'Twas slow:—Disease, augmenting year by year,
Show'd the grim king by gradual steps brought near;
'Twas not less sudden; in the night he died,
He drank, he swore, he jested, and he lied;
Thus aiding folly with departing breath:—
"Beware, *Lorenzo,* the slow-sudden death."

I think you will agree with me that Crabbe writes better verse and has a more pungent wit than his American disciple, who has added a new terror to death by the way in which he describes it.

But bad as Spoon River is as a place to die in, it must be still more awful to live there. If its necrologist is a truthful person, a real realist in poetry as he professes himself to be, his fellow villagers, take them by and large, must be a group of very undesirable citizens. Murder, seduction, bigamy, avarice, hypocrisy, drunkenness, and cruelty to children seem to be among their common habits. The exceptional qualities

of honesty, kindness, chastity, and gentle manners are usually represented by the necrologist as the possession of weak-minded persons who suffer for their virtues. Their old-fashioned faith in the wisdom and goodness of God is shrewdly suggested as rather a good joke on them. This is a view of life, to be sure, but it is a dismal view, and I doubt whether it really is a true view.

Let us quote three of these coffin-nail sketches.

LYDIA PUCKETT

"Knowlt Hoheimer ran away to the war
The day before Curl Trenary
Swore out a warrant through Justice Arnett
For stealing hogs.
But that's not the reason he turned a soldier.
He caught me running with Lucius Atherton.
We quarreled and I told him never again
To cross my path.
Then he stole the hogs and went to the war—
Back of every soldier is a woman."

BARNEY HAINSFEATHER

"If the excursion train to Peoria
Had just been wrecked, I might have escaped with
my life—
Certainly I should have escaped this place.
But as it was burned as well, they mistook me
For John Allen who was sent to the Hebrew Cemetery
At Chicago,
And John for me, so I lie here.
It was bad enough to run a clothing store in this town,
But to buried here—*ach!*"

HOMER CLAPP

"Often Aner Clute at the gate
Refused me the parting kiss,
Saying we should be engaged before that;
And just with a distant clasp of the hand
She bade me good-night, as I brought her home
From the skating rink or the revival.
No sooner did my departing footsteps die away
Than Lucius Atherton,
(So I learned when Aner went to Peoria)
Stole in at her window, or took her riding
Behind his spanking team of bays
Into the country.
The shock of it made me settle down,
And I put all the money I got from my father's estate
Into the canning factory, to get the job

Of head accountant, and lost it all.
And then I knew I was one of Life's fools,
Whom only death would treat as the equal
Of other men, making me feel like a man."

It is not difficult to enlarge and continue this series of desiccated biographies. All that is necessary is to put an ordinary short story in a hydraulic press, squeeze the life out of it, and present the remainder in broken lines. Here, for example, is one which is not in the *Anthology*.

ELMER BUNG

"Alfred Starr thought he could beat me at poetry;
But he was only an ape of old Longfellow.
Bunkum praised me, and Pod praised me,
They called my poetry pyrotechnic;
But Spoon River would not have me at any price,
It preferred Alfred's sugary twaddle.
So I went into the automobile business,
And wrote scorching epitaphs for the graveyard.
Now Alfred has a tall monument,
While I lie under a mean tombstone.
The bourgeoisie is a silly ass.
Alfred was only a successful writer,
But I am a real immortal."

It would be foolish to deny the sharp, penetrating quality of some of these sketches. They flash into hidden places precisely like the ray of a dark lantern, revealing vermiform secrets and showing now and then a chrysalis from which a frail butterfly of hope is emerging to be crushed. They are full of shocks and surprises. They are valuable as an antidote to the smooth American self-complacency whose slogan is "stand pat," and whose secret watchword is "keep the lid on." A book which takes the lid off, even if it be as unmannerly as the novel called *Revelry*, or as dismal as the anthology called *Spoon River*, serves its useful purpose and deserves its meed of praise. But this does not entitle it to a place in the celestial regions of literature,—not even among the moons and minor satellites.

Two barriers exclude the anthologist of Spoon River from the starry company of poets. First, he has not a gleam of that cosmic vision which Matthew Arnold praises in Sophocles,

"Who saw life steadily and saw it whole."

Second, his ear for verbal music is defective, if not entirely lacking. Free verse is not a bad thing, provided it is really verse,—that is to say, provided it has a measurable movement, a rhythm, a cadence of its own, even though it may not fit into any of the recognized, orthodox metres. English poetry has a right to make metrical experiments and adventures in search of new rhythms. Often the result has been something quite wonderfully musical, like some of Milton's and Tennyson's new metres; like the unrhymed verses of Charles Lamb which are quoted at the beginning of this essay; like the subtle harmonies of Whitman in his inspired moments when he escapes from the fetters of his own theory of formlessness.

But the free verse of the Spoon Riverman has not this fortunate quality. In fact it is chop-stick prose,—knock-kneed, splay-footed, St. Vitus prose, compared with which the

Charleston in its most dislocated spasms is a graceful and enchanting dance. Take this:

> "To be an editor, as I was.
> Then to lie here close by the river, over the place
> Where the sewage flows from the village,
> And the empty cans and garbage are dumped,
> And abortions are hidden."

If this is poetry then a steam-riveter is a musical instrument, and the smell of decayed sauerkraut is a sweet perfume.

It is true that the Riverman has written other volumes in which the ancient rules of metre and rhyme are followed. But in truth they are less interesting than *Spoon River*. Some of them are flippant parodies of Bible stories, not sparing even the Holiest of All. Others, (and these rather the best of the lot,) are two-step versions of the Tale of Troy and the Arthurian legends. Still others are very blank verse settings of scenes in American history. The last, published in 1926, is called *Lee, A Dramatic Poem.*

It gives a sound view, I think, of that noble and tragic hero's character and conduct. But it does not add much to the story either poetically or dramatically. And it is greatly confused and bewildered by the introduction of two mythical personages called Ormund and Arimanius. These I suppose the Riverman, in his childlike way, means to represent the ancient deities of Persian dualism, whose names were Ormuzd and Ahriman. They stand around and talk a good deal; but I can not see that they do anything about it. They are theatrical idols. It is astonishing how superstitious some of these modern unbelievers are!

However, that is a matter of opinion. The point on which this essay turns is that *Spoon River Anthology* is not a new planet swimming into our ken, but simply a dark lantern.

LIGHTS IN POETRY

V

THE FRINGE OF WORDS

THE FRINGE OF WORDS

IT seems to be generally agreed, just now, that somebody ought to "do something for English," which is assumed to be in a parlous state. I believe an extensive league (or association, if you prefer that word) has already been formed, and is actually functioning, for the purpose of protecting our beloved language from the dangerous modern influences which threaten it; on the one hand through the ignorance and laziness of the vulgar, who content themselves with a poorhouse vocabulary of slang; and on the other hand through the pernicious activity of high-browed scholars and artists who are overloading it with cacophonous polysyllabic compounds and intriguing phraseology arrogated from exotic vocabularies. (I purposely illustrate what I deplore.)

But is it just, to imply that these dangers are

altogether modern? They have been noted since the time when Thomas Fuller noted the "Chaucerisms" in Spenser, and *The Spectator* regarded such words as "sham" and "mob" as common cant. All that we can fairly say is that in our times the tendencies toward overdistention and impoverishment both seem unduly active. The dictionaries have swollen enormously, one might almost say dropsically: 317,000 terms in the one-volume *Standard;* and in the many volumes of the *New English* enough to supply a man with reading for more than ten years at the rate of fifteen minutes a day. Contrariwise, the store of words actually used by some of the new novelists and poets looks pitifully meagre when we remember that Shakespeare employed 15,000 and Milton 8,000 in his poems.

But the real perils of the English language to-day, in my judgment, lie not in expansion nor in contraction of vocabulary; but much

more in a certain noisy carelessness or sloppy indifference; a failure to recognize that thought is desirable not only before speech but also during speech; an apparent numbness to the finer sense of words. The effects of this creeping paralysis may be observed constantly in the talk of streets and shops and cabarets, and frequently in books and periodicals. For example, a distinguished historian writes that he proposes to "assess" a certain character, when he has no intention of taxing it, but simply means to estimate its worth. A popular novelist makes his hero leave a room "precipitously," yet without throwing him down the stairs or making him leap from a window. An ardent advertiser proclaims the "slogan" of his ready-made clothing, although his purposes are all pacific. Even a philosopher, a Platonist, writes that certain plays "intrigue" him, when evidently he means not that they perplex him, but merely that they interest him.

These, you may say, are only slips of the pen, mistakes which are insignificant and may be readily pardoned. But when the carelessness which they show becomes habitual and general, when it pervades not only ordinary conversation but also many highly praised books of prose and verse, we may well ask ourselves whether this is not rather a disquieting symptom. Language as an instrument of human culture and intercourse, derives its highest value from the power of its words finely to convey the different shades and degrees of human thought and feeling. Losing this, how shall we replace it? Our English will be no more

"the tongue
That Shakespeare spake,"

but the petty jargon of a jazz-party, or the loud-sounding, little-meaning verbiage of a patent-medicine promoter.

Let us reluctantly admit, then, that perhaps this is a time when somebody should "do some-

thing for English." What is it that ought to be done? Evidently little will be accomplished by stately resolutions in favor of "upholding standards," adopted by such select bodies as the American Academy, most of whose members already have a pleasing conviction that they use fairly good English,—or at least try to do so. Nor do I reckon that much benefit will accrue from the outpouring of verbal vials of wrath upon the younger generation for their supposed defects of grammar and morals. Reform is seldom effected by abuse. It would be far more to the purpose to lay a finger upon some of the probable causes of the dreaded degeneracy; or, better still, to suggest ways of thinking and feeling about our language which may have in them some remedial and reinvigorating power. For, after all, thought and feeling are the most potent remedies.

It is in this line that I venture to offer my small contribution. I have no new philosophy

of language, no new system of doctrine about poetry, to present. May the kind stars forbid that I should rush in where truant angels have not feared to tread. All that I want to do is to direct consideration to a certain element, or quality, of language which is too often overlooked, and to suggest that this consideration may throw some light upon the important and vexed question of poetic diction. For poetry, as it is the earliest, is also the most enduring and powerful, form of literature, and does most to enlarge and illuminate human intercourse. "It is the poets," writes Sir Walter Raleigh, "who preserve language from pollution and enrich it with new powers. They redeem words from degradation by a single noble employment. They establish a tradition that bridges over the treacherous currents and quicksands of time and fashion."

I hold therefore that good poetry is of great value to a people. It not only begets good

prose, but also nourishes and keeps alive those sentiments of "admiration, hope, and love" by which we live. And it offers, for their communication from mind to mind, from generation to generation, wonderfully condensed and lasting and beautiful forms. These, it seems to me, are woven of the words that belong to the wedding garment of poetry. They are the true poetic diction.

I should like to trace briefly the path of experience by which I was led to this conclusion. For, as Plutarch says, "It was not so much by means of words I came to a complete understanding of things, as that from things I somehow had an experience which enabled me to follow the meaning of words."

You remember, of course, the famous dispute on the subject of Poetic Diction, between Wordsworth and Coleridge, both of them poets who knew how to write clear and pregnant prose. Wordsworth's youthful spirit, disap-

pointed in the great hopes which he had staked on the French Revolution, had turned from politics to poetry. He sought to begin, in that ideal region, a more successful revolution against the tyranny of conventional thought and artificial, stilted, unmeaning language, which had enchained the English poets, with rare exceptions, since the days of Milton. He wished to break these bonds and return to reality, simplicity, freedom; to get closer to nature and human nature; to let feeling and imagination work with the material which life itself gives, and weave the garment of poesy with the threads of common speech. In this adventure his friend Coleridge set out with him, though in a more romantic spirit. The volume of *Lyrical Ballads* which they published together in 1798 is the first milestone of a new departure in English verse. Compare this little book with Goldsmith's anthology, *The Beauties of English Poesy*, made in 1767, and you feel

at once that literature is on a new road with a new star to guide it.

But as Wordsworth travelled this road, enduring with calm self-confidence the ridicule of those who thought him on the way to imbecility, and winning the praise and honor of the few choice spirits who saw the wayside beauty and the wide commanding outlooks of the path he trod, he felt more and more the strange temptation of poets to explain themselves and their works in prose, to justify by theory and defend with argument the poems which were conceived in emotion and fashioned by the instinct of joy. The brief "Advertisement" in the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, was expanded, two years later, into a long and elaborate "Preface." This again was enlarged in the edition of his collected poems in 1815, and he added to it an "Appendix" on Poetic Diction, and an "Essay Supplementary to the Preface," on the nature and function of poetry. All these are well worth

reading even to-day, being written in lucid, vigorous, and at times most eloquent English, and filled with luminous criticism of life and literature.

But the special point of interest for us now is the theory which Wordsworth sets forth in regard to the language proper to poetry. This theory may be reduced to a logical sequence of three affirmations. First: the real language of humble and rustic men has a supreme excellence "because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived." Second: "a selection of language really used" by such men, when "fitted to metrical arrangement," becomes the best medium for imparting "that sort of pleasure which a poet may rationally endeavor to impart." Third: "it may be safely affirmed that there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition."

Coleridge, a greater critic though a lesser poet, assailed these three positions, and particularly the last, in his *Biographia Literaria.* With the disconcerting frankness of a friend he shows that Wordsworth's mild reservations ("selection of language," "metrical arrangement," and the like) reduce his theory to a truism or a nullity; that his own poetry produces its most wonderful effects when he uses a diction which is distinctly not the ordinary speech of humble and rustic men, but something very different, both in the order of the words and in the meaning which they convey; that he is at his best as a poet when his genius escapes from the fetters of his theory and he writes as all the great masters have written, in language which, whether plain or stately, is essentially poetic, creative, illuminating, revealing, surprising us, not always as Keats said "by a fine excess," but sometimes also by a fine simplicity. Coleridge gives many excellent illustrations of this. Let us take two of our own, both from the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads.*

The first is an invitation to a country walk; (the italics here and elsewhere are mine).

"And hark! how *blithe* the throstle sings!
And he is no mean preacher:
Come forth into *the light of things,*
Let Nature be your teacher.

"Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up these barren leaves;
Come forth, and *bring with you a heart*
That watches and receives."

The second is from a poem more in the grand manner, the *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey.*

"I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Not harsh nor grating, though of *ample power*
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of *something far more deeply interfused,*
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

It is idle to say that there is no essential difference between this language and the language of prose. There is a vital difference which we feel instinctively. It is more than the charm of metre. It is something in the choice of words, in their power of evocation, which makes the language, not in the old sense, but in the true sense, poetic diction.

Now what is that magical something, so easy to perceive, so hard to define? Coleridge did not help me with this question, but left me, like his Ancient Mariner, very much at sea. I knew that there was a difference between prose and poetry, something more than the difference between free rhythm and musical metre; but I could get no suggestion of its nature until one day, some twenty-five years ago, I came upon certain passages in *The Principles of Psychology*, by William James.

"Knowledge *about* a thing," wrote this acute philosopher, "is knowledge of its relations. Acquaintance with it is limitation to the bare impression which it makes. Of most of its relations we are only aware in the penumbral nascent way of a 'fringe' of inarticulated affinities about it. In all our voluntary thinking there is some topic or subject about which all the members of the thought revolve. . . . Relation to our topic or interest is constantly felt in the *fringe*, and particularly the relation of harmony or discord, of furtherance or hindrance of the topic. When the sense of furtherance is there, we are 'all right'; with the sense of hindrance we are dissatisfied and perplexed, and cast about us for other thoughts. Now any thought *the quality of whose fringe lets us feel ourselves 'all right,'* is an acceptable member of our thinking, whatever kind of thought it may otherwise be."

These propositions, and others akin to them, William James expanded through many pages

and illustrated with curves and angles and straight lines and other geometrical figures, after the approved but somewhat bewildering method of modern psychologists. But the idea that caught and held my attention, (according to the very doctrine which Mr. James had set forth,) was something that lay beyond "the limitation to the bare impression," something in the region of relations and affinities, the country of the "fringe."

If it be true, I said to myself, that things and thoughts have these fringes, these suffusions, these psychic overtones about them, may not the same be true of words, which are the symbols of thoughts and the images of things? Certainly words carry with them a subtle yet perceptible atmosphere of relations and suggestions beyond their literal meaning, a personal *aura* as it were, derived sometimes from their sound (for the real word is always something heard, of which the written letters are only a conventional sign) ; or

coming it may be from their associations, or a dim remembrance of their origin in some ancient tongue; or gathered from their use in human intercourse and clinging to them like "the odours of the valleys" which De Guérin's young Centaur perceived about his mother when she returned from her roaming in the outer world to their cave among the mountains. This indefinable power of suggestion and evocation in words is their magic, their secret of interpretation and revelation, the hidden source from which their color and their fragrance rise like an exhalation.

It seemed to me at the time that this idea might be a clew to lead me through the labyrinth of discussion about the nature of poetic diction, and bring me at least a little nearer to the truth. I disfigured (or enriched) the margin of a page in Professor James' valuable textbook, with a written note: "Poetic language,—its value and beauty derived from these fringes of words." Since then I have thought much

about the suggestion, and tried to test it by application to various poems, in order to discover what truth it contained, and what were the limitations to be observed to prevent it from exaggerating itself into a falsehood.

Of course, any reader trained in the subtleties of thought and the niceties of expression, is aware of these limitations, reservations, and exceptions before they are stated, and takes them for granted without discussion. For example: that some words have more, some less, and some very little of this fringe, this *aura* of suggestion, about them; that the effect even of the richest words depends a good deal on the intelligence and sensitiveness of the listener or the reader, and that some men are born color-blind to language, and others, in the glare of the electric light, achieve color-blindness; that a considerable part both of excellent prose and of admirable verse is written in very plain and simple words, which derive what Sir Walter Raleigh calls their "bare intolerable force"

from the way in which they are used, the order in which they are arranged, or the stark sincerity with which they express a deep and powerful feeling; that the vital elements of poetry, strong emotion and vivid imagination, are more important than verbal magic and musical charm: these are propositions which every sensible man will admit without argument.

But, after these limitations are accepted, what remains of value in this suggestion of the fringe of words as a thing to be considered in poetry? There remains a twofold truth, one side of which gives a warning against bad diction, while the other suggests the way to language which will clothe the poet's thought in beauty.

There are words which are distinctly non-poetic,—scientific terms; technical phrases of law or business; mere colloquialisms, like "Oh say"; and ancient *clichés* of imagery which have been worn smooth by much handling. There are also words which, by reason of ludicrous or triv-

ial associations, are positively anti-poetic, because they break the "stream of thought" and create that "sense of hindrance" which, as William James says, leaves us "dissatisfied and perplexed." This is why some of the verses of the Impressionists and the Vers-Librists are so hard to read and so impossible to remember. They are like packs of fire-crackers, exploding in a series of violent concussions. Or they are like dull rivers, laden with absurd débris, trailing through a region of backyards and scrap-heaps.

Here are a few illustrations of anti-poetic diction. A late Georgian poet, writing about the sunset, describes Earth as a weary Titan,

"Panting red *pants* into the dying day."

Mr. Carl Sandburg says:

"The past is a *bucket of ashes.*"

Now "ashes of the past" was once a poetic phrase, though it has now become rather a

cliché. But when you lug in the "bucket," it makes one think of the janitor and the garbage can. Mr. Edgar Lee Masters writes, in a much-noticed book of "free verse,"

"She was some kind of a crying thing
One takes in one's arms, and all at once
It slimes your face with its running nose
And voids its essence all over you;
Then bites your hand and springs away.
And there you stand bleeding and smelling to heaven!"

To call this poetry is to manhandle a sacred word.

On the other side, there is a kind of language which by virtue of its fringe of associations belongs to poetry, and has a singular power to enhance its beauty and to deepen its meaning. It is in this diction that the finest passages, the most memorable lines, are written. Sometimes it is by the succession or stately ordering of rich phrases that the effect is produced, like the unrolling of a splendid tapestry. Sometimes it is by a single touch that the imagination is evoked

and the passage irradiated. This is what Tennyson meant, and illustrated, in his fine poem *To Virgil:*

"All the charm of all the Muses often *flowering*
in a lonely word."

In Shakespeare's thirtieth sonnet is another example:

"When to the *sessions of sweet silent thought*
I summon up remembrance of things past."

In prose the meaning is simply this: "while I am quietly thinking, I begin to recollect past events." But in poetry, sweet silent Thought is holding the sessions of her court and Remembrance is summoned as a witness.

In *Samson Agonistes*, Milton puts these words into the mouth of old Manoa, standing by the dead body of his mighty son:

"Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast; no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise, or blame; *nothing but well and fair,*
And what may *quiet* us in a death so noble."

What a magic there is in that word "quiet," with its reminiscence of the Latin *requiescat*, and of the verse in the Psalms, "Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven."

One of Wordsworth's shorter poems begins thus:

> "There is an Eminence,—of these our hills
> The last that *parleys* with the setting sun."

It is enough for prose to say that this hill is touched by the latest ray of sunset while the other hills are in shadow. But poetry will have it that the mountain "parleys" with the departing sun in that golden hour.

Take two or three illustrations from living American poets. Edwin Markham writes of the death of Lincoln:

> *"As when a kingly cedar, green with boughs,*
> Goes down *with a great shout* upon the hills,
> *And leaves a lonesome place against the sky."*

George Woodberry, in his elegy, *The North Shore Watch*, says:

"Beauty abides, nor suffers mortal change,
Eternal refuge of the orphaned mind."

Edwin Arlington Robinson, whose Muse is wont to walk in plain and stringent robes, writes in his "L'Envoi" to *The Children of the Night:*

"Now in a thought, now in a *shadowed word,*
Now in a voice that thrills eternity,
Ever there comes an *onward phrase to me*
Of some transcendent music I have heard."

Turn now to one of the most perfectly poetic of all English poems, John Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale.* Mark the fringes of the woven words in a single stanza:

"Thou wast not *born for death,* immortal Bird!
No *hungry generations* tread thee down;
The voice I hear *this passing night* was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that *found a path*
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, *sick for home,*
She stood in tears *amid the alien corn;*
The same that oft-times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

"*Forlorn!*" he cries in the next stanza, "*the very word is like a bell.*"

Yes, young Master, you know the secret of your Muse. Her chosen words, her best-beloved, most potent words, are like bells with their overtones and undertones: great bells whose deep roar throbs far over sea and shore; loud bells that fiercely sound the tocsin above sleeping cities; glad bells that chime for festivals of mirth; mournful bells that toll for human sorrow; soft bells that ring the angelus of rest for weary hearts. A perfect carillon!

Into his high belfry the poet climbs alone; he lays his hand upon the word-keys whose fringed tones he knows by instinct; he presses the keys and the blending bell-music flows upon the air, awakening hope and courage, quickening joy, purifying fear, soothing grief, meaning always far more than it says, and, as it dies away at last, leaving in the soul that undying pleasure which it is the mission of poetry to impart,—something immortal,—

"We feel that we are greater than we know!"

II

PROBLEMATIC NATURES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

"PROBLEMATIC NATURES" is a term used by Goethe to denote a class of persons in whom there are two temperaments, two sets of qualities not only diverse but really hostile to each other. Perhaps Goethe would have called them "double personalities," if that foolish phrase had then been current. His own doubting and bedevilled hero, Faust, belonged to this class. But in describing and explaining him the poet seems to lean more to some theory of demonic or angelic influence than to the somewhat absurd notion that one man can be composed of two persons.

However we may view the psychological question, it remains true that these problematic natures are almost always vivid, usually interesting, often dramatic, and sometimes capable of

great things. There is something strange and unaccountable about them. With them it is the unexpected that happens. They attract strong likings and dislikings, ardent friends and bitter enemies. Neutrality toward them seems difficult if not impossible. Their very inconsistencies pique the attention. I think the patriarch Jacob, King David, and perhaps the Apostle Peter, at least originally, had something of this perplexing quality in them. Certainly Mary Queen of Scots and Napoleon Bonaparte were problematic natures, and so the debate, controversy, and conflict about them continue to this day.

It has occurred to me that a few notes on English writers of this two-sided type might not be altogether without interest to those who hold, as I do, that a man sooner or later gets himself into his work somewhere and somehow. If this be true, even with limitations, it should be helpful to the real understanding of a book to know

something of its author. Biography has a certain relation to criticism. Literature has a real connection with history. And history is as Carlyle said, "the essence of innumerable biographies."

Of course the book itself, poem, novel, essay, or treatise, has a right to be judged impersonally on its merits or demerits as a piece of literary work. Yet even this judgment, to be worth anything, must have a certain knowledge and discrimination in it. It must be based on standards derived from the study of what has been accepted as excellent in the past. It must be guided and animated by a clear and sane idea of what is desirable in the future. The current notion, illustrated in numberless so-called "reviews," that a critic is a simple impudent creature who tells us what he likes or dislikes without giving any sound reason for it,—one who praises the members of his literary guild because they resemble him and sneers at all outsiders

as "high-brows," "bourgeois," or "intolerably moral folks,"—one who says of a new novel that it is "a whale of a book," and of a volume which ignores equally the rules of grammar and the habits of decency that "it throbs with the glorious inspiration of revolt, a noble protest against outworn superstitions,"—the current notion that such a person is a critic because he says so, is as foolish as the faith that accepts as truth the statement that "Poopenadie's Universal Health-Juice makes the young irresistible, the middle-aged irresponsible, and the old irrepressible," simply because the publicity agents say so.

Criticism, if it is to be worth anything at all, must be capable of a disinterested consideration of literary work on its merits, of judging it as it is and of giving an intelligible reason for the judgment. But if criticism is to belong to *literae humaniores* it must also take into its account some sympathetic knowledge of the char-

acter and circumstances of the human being who wrote the book, for only thus does literature take its place as a real part of life. This is the reason why I have been led to attempt some comment upon a few problematic natures in English literature.

PROBLEMATIC NATURES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

VI

A REBELLIOUS POET

A REBELLIOUS POET

AMONG all English men of letters none has been the subject of so much controversy and conflict as George Gordon, Lord Byron. Like Patroclus, in the *Iliad*, he was not only a fighter while he lived, but a cause of fighting among others after he was dead. Opinions of him, as uttered by men of authority, are various, contradictory, and extreme.

Goethe called him "unquestionably the greatest talent of the century." Carlyle called him "a sulky dandy." Mazzini, the Italian liberal, compared him to Prometheus; and Castelar, the Spanish republican, to the Prophet Jeremiah; but Southey, the English poet laureate, compared him to Moloch, Belial, and Satan. Taine said that Wordsworth and Walter Scott seemed "poor and gloomy" beside him. Scherer, the penetrating French critic, saw in him "a re-

markable inability ever to lift himself into the region of real poetic art." Walter Savage Landor wrote of him in 1822, "he supported his sinking fame by some signal act of profligacy, an elegy by a seduction, an heroic by an adultery, a tragedy by a divorce." But in 1824 the same Landor wrote of the same Byron: "O that I could have clasped his hand before he died! only to make him more enamoured of his own virtues, and to keep him with them always."

Whirled about by such violent contradictory opinions, our judgment falls into a vertigo. Was Byron a great genius, or a clever charlatan; tarnished gold, or burnished brass; an injured angel driven to dissipation by the stupid cruelty of the orthodox world, or an egotistic devil, eloquently complaining of the penalty of his own misdeeds?

None of these irreconcilable extremes satisfies me. Nor shall we reach the truth by taking a little from both sides and forming a compromise

in oscillating criticism. Carlyle was no more right than Goethe, Taine than Scherer. It seems to me that the first hint of a true view is suggested by bluff old Landor in his wish to make Byron "more enamoured of his own virtues, and to keep him with them always." Moreover, I think now is the time to clarify this hint and to expand the view toward which it points.

The political prejudices and animosities which made Byron hate England and flee from it as from a pest-house, are extinct or transformed. His fierce contempt for the established English Church and social order enhanced his popularity in Continental Europe, but does not disturb us much here in America, where freedom of conscience is the only form of religion established by law, and where a reasonable liberty has been attained without destroying a tolerable social order. A fair, calm, steady estimate of Byron and his work should be possible for us, here and now. If we try to make this

estimate, I think we shall see that the secret of the rebellious poet lies in his *problematic nature.* There was a war within him even fiercer than the war about him,—a conflict between Ormuzd and Ahriman,—and this conflict had a powerful effect on his conduct and his work.

It would be folly to deny that he was a highly gifted man,—a genius, if you like that word. He had a rich imagination, a vivid fancy, a sense of melody, and an amazing command of language. His energy was wonderful. Force radiated from him. His bodily presence, but for one defect, was splendid,—a lame Apollo,—a "god in a car" of enormous driving-power and feeble control. Whatever he did was done with force, but often he seemed not to know or care what he did. He was driven instead of driving. There are times when you feel this in his poetry. It is swift but not sure, even in minor matters like grammar and euphony. On slippery roads it skids.

How much of his character and conduct may be traced to heredity, how much to environment, and how much to his own erratic, undeliberate choice, God only knows and no psychoanalyst can tell us. But this much is certain: there were two sides to the man and they were at strife. One side was vain, self-indulgent, ostentatious, vulgar, licentious, cruel; the other was generous, kind, brave, nobly scornful of hypocrisy and tyranny, finely enthusiastic for the ancient and ever-living cause of human liberty. As he veered from one side to the other, not only his conduct and manners, but also the tone and quality of his poetry seemed to change. Toward those whom he regarded as below him he was considerate and often magnanimous: his servants were devoted to him, and of animals he was fond. Toward the few whom he recognized as above him, like Sir Walter Scott, he often showed a fine admiration and respect. Toward those who were more or less on a level with him

he was impatient, impertinent, and at times abusive.

His first book of verse, published in 1807, while he was a student at Cambridge, was properly entitled *Hours of Idleness, by George Gordon, Lord Byron, A Minor.* It was also properly spanked by the *Edinburgh Review.* To this spanking, Byron replied with a much better poem, a stinging satire called *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.* In this, though he was himself of half-Scottish blood and had passed his early boyhood in Aberdeen, he poured his contempt upon the Caledonian critics and made some useful enemies for life.

Such was Byron's debut in the world of letters, and though it gave little promise of the high fame which he was to attain after the appearance of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, yet from the outset it attracted considerable attention in England, first because

"The English people dearly love a lord,"

second because the legend of his loose romantic life was already widely current and the English, even more than the Americans, dearly love a scandal; and third because the satire was cleverer and more peppery than anything since Pope, in imitation of whose style it was evidently written.

It seems to me that there were certain misfortunes in Byron's life, from the warping influence of which he could hardly escape. One of these was his mother, a fantastic person of unwholesome type, who alternately spoiled and neglected her son, fondling him one day, and the next day throwing a poker at him and calling him "you lame brat."

Another handicap was his inheritance of a stained title and an encumbered estate. Being a lord was very bad for him, and he had a dreadfully "movie-picture" idea of how to do it. When his name was first called in school with the prefix "*Domine*," he was so thrilled that he

burst out crying. In spite of his democratic principles, he never could forget his title; but instead of binding him to duty, it made him vain, touchy, ostentatious, and disdainful. At college he made himself notorious by his wild pranks, such as keeping a tame bear in his rooms and giving out that he intended the bear to sit for a fellowship. When he took his place in the House of Lords he gave a haughty snub to the Lord Chancellor in passing, and carelessly took his seat on the opposition side, where he always stayed.

But his greatest handicap was his lameness. Whether it was congenital or the result of infantile paralysis, we do not know; of its precise nature and extent there is no clear evidence, for he succeeded by painful effort in almost concealing it, and, even on his death-bed, he kept his left foot and leg closely hidden. What is certain is that it made walking difficult for him, running and dancing impossible. This lameness

LORD BYRON.
From a sketch by Count D'Orsay, May, 1823.

was his unaccepted burden, his thorn in the flesh, which buffeted him not into a cheerful resignation, as a similar affliction did with Sir Walter Scott, but into a sullen rebelliousness and sometimes into a wild revolt. He was athletic in other respects. He could play cricket well, with another boy to run the wickets for him. He could row and ride excellently. He was a notable swimmer. But he limped; and for this he found it hard to forgive God or to accept the Cosmos with good will. Yet who are we to judge the man for this? Do we never complain or rebel? All we have a right to do is to trace, if we can with sympathy, the effect of his misfortunes on his work and on his two-fold nature.

That there was a nobler side of the man can not be doubted. We see him at school offering to take half the licking when his friend Robert Peel is to be punished for disobedience; and again, when a younger boy, lame like himself, is

cruelly bullied, Byron interferes and promises to thrash any one who hurts the little cripple. We see him, in spite of his affected idleness, reading industriously, widely, and intelligently. His list of books drawn up in 1807, includes history, biography, philosophy, poetry, politics, Latin and Greek classics, eighteenth-century essayists and novelists. He may not have been profound, but he had a proper scorn of self-complacent ignorance. His generosity was large and warm-hearted. Quiet gifts flowed from him to the distressed and needy. We find him sending a thousand pounds to pay off the inherited debts of a poor clerical friend; and relieving the destitution of a lady whom he never knew, the widow of Lord Falkland who had lost his life in a silly duel.

After some months of senseless dissipation in London, he staged, with some boon companions, a final revel in his dilapidated baronial hall of Newstead Abbey. They rode in between a bear

and a wolf chained at the entrance. They fired off their pistols like a gang of illuminated cowboys. They caroused, night and day, disguised as monks. They drank unlimited wine out of a hollow skull. They talked and talked and "cussed" and discussed. They provided immense material for the silver screen of untaken motion-pictures. And then the party dissipated, and the melancholy young lord, sated but not satisfied, sailed away from England

"to cross the brine,
And travel Paynim shores, and pass Earth's central line."

In the course of two years he visited Portugal, Spain, Malta, Greece, Turkey, and the Grecian Archipelago; collected much splendid scenery, historical associations, and experiences of many ladies of diverse charms and virtues; had no heroic adventures, except the swimming of the Hellespont; failed to get anywhere near

"Earth's central line"; and returned to England with a romantic reputation, and two manuscripts in his luggage.

One of them was called *Hints from Horace*, and he thought more highly of it than any one else did. The other contained the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and he thought so little of it that he gave it to his friend Dallas and told him to do as he liked with it. So Dallas did; and one morning, after its publication by John Murray, Byron "awoke and found himself famous." The rich unrestrained eloquence of the poem, its splendid descriptions, its passion for natural beauty and ancient history and vivid humanity, took the world by storm.

"Ancient of days! august Athena! where,
Where are thy men of might? thy grand in soul?
Gone—glimmering through the dream of things that were:
First in the race that led to Glory's goal,
They won, and passed away—is this the whole?
A schoolboy's tale, the wonder of an hour!

The warrior's weapon and the sophist's stole
Are sought in vain, and o'er each mouldering tower,
Dim with the mist of years, gray flits the shade of power."

There is magic in such verse as this; and when it comes from a sad and reckless young lord, handsome, pathetic, irresistible, a lame Apollo, the enchantment is complete, the laurel wreath is woven, the smoke of adulation fills the shrine. No wonder Byron's head was turned. His name was on every lip. Society opened its arms to him. He went where he pleased and took what he wanted. He was the idol of fashion, the splendid young aristocrat who had espoused the cause of liberty. The gilded youth with one accord assumed his world-weary air and his rolling collar open at the neck. The women ran after him. His excitement communicated itself to his Muse and she brought forth with amazing fertility: *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos* (written in four days), *The Corsair* (written in ten days), *Lara* (written while undressing after

balls and masquerades). In all these swift stories in verse, Byron himself appears in fancy-dress, as the hero. Then come the *Hebrew Melodies*, with some lovely lyrics.

"She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

. . . . . .

"And on that cheek, and on that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!"

This sounds as if it were written on a new leaf. In fact that leaf had been turned, for in January, 1815, Byron was married to Miss Milbanke, an intelligent, devout, and staid young lady, of some beauty, modest fortune, and large expectations. Perhaps she dreamed of reforming him, and he of enlivening her. For

a time they were happy and comfortable together. Their first and only child, Augusta Ada, was born in December of the same year. Five weeks later Lady Byron went, with her baby, ostensibly to pay a short visit to her parents in Leicestershire. On the way, she wrote her husband an affectionate, cheerful letter. The next communication was a letter from her father, saying that she did not intend to return to Byron. This decision she confirmed, accusing him of conduct which was "unpardonable except on the supposition that he was insane." More precise grounds of separation were not stated.

Byron resisted, declared his willingness to meet any definite charge against him, said that he had no reproach to make against his wife except her leaving him, and that he would be glad to "renew his marriage." But the lady was dumb and obdurate. The case was not brought into open court, but referred to Dr. Lushington, a wise and able lawyer. After examining the evi-

dence, he gave his decision that separation was inevitable. Lady Byron welcomed it. Byron submitted to it with desperate reluctance.

Fifty-three years later, Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe published an article in *The Atlantic Monthly*, in which she stated, on the asserted authority of Lady Byron, that the real cause of the abandonment was Byron's incestuous love for his half-sister, Mrs. Augusta Leigh. This abominable tale was never proved; but there are people in the world who will believe anything if it is nasty enough; and so the story was repeated and expanded *ad libidinem* in 1905, in a foolish book called *Astarte*, by Lady Byron's grandson, the Earl of Lovelace. The volume was reprinted in 1921, with additions which do not make it any more credible.

Against the story stands the undeniable fact that Lady Byron remained on terms of intimate affection with Mrs. Leigh until long after Byron's death, and called her "the best friend that

God ever raised up." Would this have been possible except on the supposition that Lady Byron was slightly insane? And if she was insane, then the shameful story becomes the hallucination of a hysterical woman in the decline of life,—a thing common enough, but not of serious importance.

What remains evidently true is that the separation forced upon Byron was a bad thing and that he took it badly. He had the execrable taste to print two "poems on his domestic circumstances," which quickly found their way into the newspapers. The fashionable world, fickle as always, sided with Lady Byron. The fragrant incense of adulation gave way to the malodorous oil-smoke of abuse. He was threatened, and warned not to show himself in public. Wounded, enraged, resentful, he shook the dust of England from his feet and left his native land with a melodious curse, never to return.

Not quietly did he go, seeking retirement and

healing for his grievous wound, but proudly and loudly, displaying through Europe "the pageant of his bleeding heart." He set out in a huge gilt coach, a copy of one used by Napoleon. On horseback he wore an embroidered yellow jacket with three rows of buttons, a blue velvet cap with gold tassel, and a big pair of pistols. By the Lake of Geneva he formed a friendship with the runaway poet Shelley and an intimacy with Miss Jane Clairmont, a connection of Shelley's, by elopement. The intimacy resulted in the birth of Byron's second daughter, Allegra. He said of himself at that time: "I never led so moral a life as in [Switzerland]; but gained no credit by it."

One thing however he did achieve, and that was some of his finest poetry: the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *The Prisoner of Chillon*, part of *Manfred*, *Stanzas to Augusta*, and *The Dream*. Let us take two short self-revealing fragments.

From *The Dream*, the last two stanzas:

"A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
The Lady of his love;—Oh! she was changed
As by the sickness of the soul; her mind
Had wander'd from its dwelling, and her eyes
They had not their own lustre, but the look
Which is not of the earth; she was become
The queen of a fantastic realm; her thoughts
Were combinations of disjointed things;
And forms, impalpable and unperceived
Of others' sight, familiar were to hers.
And this the world calls frenzy; but the wise
Have a far deeper madness, and the glance
Of melancholy is a fearful gift:
What is it but the telescope of truth?
Which strips the distance of its fantasies,
And brings life near in utter nakedness,
Making the cold reality too real!

"A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
The Wanderer was alone as heretofore,
The beings which surrounded him were gone,
Or were at war with him; he was a mark
For blight and desolation, compass'd round
With Hatred and Contention; Pain was mix'd
In all which was served up to him, until,
Like to the Pontic monarch of old days,
He fed on poisons, and they had no power,
But were a kind of nutriment; he lived

Through that which had been death to many men,
And made him friends of mountains: with the stars
And the quick Spirit of the Universe
He held his dialogues; and they did teach
To him the magic of their mysteries;
To him the book of Night was open'd wide,
And voices from the deep abyss reveal'd
A marvel and a secret—Be it so.

"My dream was past; it had no further change.
It was of a strange order, that the doom
Of these two creatures should be thus traced out
Almost like a reality—the one
To end in madness—both in misery."

SONNET ON CHILLON

Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!
Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art,
For there thy habitation is the heart—
The heart which love of thee alone can bind;
And when thy sons to fetters are consign'd—
To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,
Their country conquers with their martyrdom,
And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.
Chillon! thy prison is a holy place,
And thy sad floor an altar; for 'twas trod,
Until his very steps have left a trace
Worn, as if thy cold pavement were a sod,
By Bonnivard!—May none those marks effact!
For they appeal from tyranny to God.

From Switzerland Byron went to Italy, where he finished *Manfred*, wrote the superb fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *Mazeppa*, *Beppo*, some poetic dramas, *Don Juan* and other satirical verse. He also added a rather loud red to several already colorful Italian cities. The last of his *amours* was with the Countess Guiccioli, who was young and beautiful, and had good sense.

She told him that *Don Juan*, for all its mocking wit, would make no real addition to his fame. She encouraged and deepened his hatred of tyrants and love of freedom. For her he wrote one of his finer poems, *The Prophecy of Dante*, and through her he became actively interested in the efforts of the Carbonari to free Italy from the Austrian yoke. Shelley, who had become a warm friend of Byron, wrote from Ravenna, "His connexion with La Guiccioli has been of inestimable benefit to him. He lives in considerable splendour, but within his income, which

is now about four thousand pounds a year, one thousand of which he devotes to charity."

I have done this sketch of Byron but ill, if you do not feel the struggle of the two natures in the man. The one, proud, sensual, reckless, mocking, was dominant at first. But through it all, as he once said to his wife, "the trouble with me is I *do* believe." The other nature, sensitive, magnanimous, open-handed, courageous, passionately devoted to the cause of liberty, protesting bitterly at times against its own enslavement, at last asserted itself in the rebellion that is really great,—the revolt of the better nature against the worse,—and wrote the final chapter of Byron's life in letters of gold.

He had long been a lover of "the glory that was Greece." Now the cause of Greek independence, struggling against Turkish tyranny, called to him with a voice irresistible. Sailing from Genoa in July, 1823, in a ship which he had chartered, and with all the money he could

raise, he joined the Greek insurgents. They were divided, quarrelling as Greeks have always done, even at the siege of Troy. He labored wisely to unite them, and then made his toilsome journey through fever-stricken marshes to the imperilled town of Missolonghi. The wild chiefs welcomed him as a prince. But he was weakened by exposure, shaken with fever. Here he wrote his last poem, *On This Day I Complete My Thirty-Sixth Year.* (Jan. 22, 1824.)

'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,
  Since others it hath ceased to move:
Yet, though I cannot be beloved,
  Still let me love!

My days are in the yellow leaf;
  The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
  Are mine alone!

The fire that on my bosom preys
  Is lone as some volcanic isle;
No torch is kindled at its blaze—
  A funeral pile.

The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
  The exalted portion of the pain
And power of love, I cannot share,
  But wear the chain.

But 'tis not *thus*—and 'tis not *here*—
  Such thoughts should shake my soul, nor *now*,
Where glory decks the hero's bier,
  Or binds his brow.

The sword, the banner, and the field,
  Glory and Greece, around me see!
The Spartan, borne upon his shield,
  Was not more free.

Awake! (not Greece—she *is* awake!)
  Awake, my spirit! Think through *whom*
Thy life-blood tracks its parent lake,
  And then strike home!

Tread those reviving passions down,
  Unworthy manhood!—unto thee
Indifferent should the smile or frown
  Of beauty be.

If thou regrett'st thy youth, *why live?*
  The land of honourable death
Is here:—up to the field, and give
  Away thy breath!

Seek out—less often sought than found—
A soldier's grave, for thee the best;
Then look around, and choose thy ground,
And take thy rest.

The time had come indeed. On April 11th his illness increased; desperate remedies were used; but he sank steadily. In delirium, he fancied himself at the head of his handful of troops, and cried, "Forward, forward, follow me!" Then he spoke of his dear sister,—his little lost daughter Ada,—his wife,—charging his devoted servant to go to her and tell her all. His final words, murmured in Greek, were, "Now I must go to sleep."

On April 19th the rebellious poet found peace. His last breath, like purified and precious incense, went up to heaven beside the broken altar of a noble cause.

PROBLEMATIC NATURES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

VII

A FIGHTING MAN OF SENTIMENT

A FIGHTING MAN OF SENTIMENT

ONE of the best criticisms of our Rebellious Poet, Byron, was written by a contemporary, a hundred years ago. It runs thus: "Lord Byron, who in his politics is a liberal, in his genius is haughty and aristocratic. . . . He makes man in his own image, woman after his own heart; the one is a capricious tyrant, the other a yielding slave; he gives us the misanthrope and the voluptuary by turns; and with these two characters, burning or melting in their own fires, he makes out everlasting cantos of himself. In reading Lord Byron's works, he himself is never absent from our minds. The coloring of [his] style, however rich and dipped in Tyrian dyes, is nevertheless opaque. . . . Intensity is the great and prominent distinction of [his]

writings. His only object seems to be to stimulate himself and his readers for the moment, to substitute a feverish and irritable state of excitement for listless indolence or calm enjoyment."

This is penetrating criticism, though in the last sentence not quite just. It was written by William Hazlitt, who was himself a "problematic nature" and one of the great masters of English prose,—clear, vivid, suggestive, illuminating, and, at the right times, eloquent. His essays are too much forgotten and neglected in this age when so many young men and women are ambitious to be authors and too indolent to take the pains to learn how. The best way to do this is by observation, just as you learn good tennis, or riding, or swimming. If you wish to write well, you must read those who have written well,—the novels of Fielding, Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, and, for a modern instance, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey;* the essays of Bacon, Dryden, Temple, Addison, Lamb, Haz-

litt, and for a modern instance, Paul Elmer More. A course of reading like this, (including, naturally, many other writers according to predilection,) would do much toward the forming of a good style by a young intending author. In a person of independent intelligence, it might even counteract the alternately irritating and depressing influence of our Smart Aleck school of critics, and of the Damitall fiction which is written to sell, and which does so amazingly.

Hazlitt at his best is a very entertaining and tonic writer. He observes acutely and expresses himself with vigor but without strain. His range of interest is wide and his choice of words almost always nice, though not, as the overworked modern epithet has it, "meticulous," which means, of course, anxious, over-scrupulous, fearful. Hazlitt is not meticulous; he moves without fear because he knows his way, and so does not break down the hedges or tram-

ple the flowers with the nervous impudence of the literary bounder. This makes him a pleasant man to follow.

In his literary work he was generally fortunate, but in his personal life he was unfortunate because of his problematic nature. There were two elements in him which did not mix well. He was born with a nature in which sentiment, feeling, emotion were dominant. Avid of pleasure, he found it in many things: a long walk over the hills; the English countryside in the bloom of spring; the throng and bustle of a city street; a racy old book by the open fire; a great, eloquent painting; a lively, sensible talk in a little circle of friends; good things to eat and drink, after a day in the open air; a stirring play well acted; a stiff bout in the prize-ring; a handsome, spirited man, a beautiful woman; a swift game in the fives-court; a stiff and searching argument on high themes; a fine tale of chivalrous romance; a lofty philosophic dis-

course; and plentiful bowls of the strongest possible tea. All these he enjoyed and described with gusto.

That indeed is his great characteristic, his intimate personal word,—*gusto*. Let him tell what he means by it.

"Gusto in art is power or passion defining any object. . . . There is hardly any object entirely devoid of expression, . . . without some precise association with pleasure or pain; and it is in giving this truth of character from the truth of feeling that gusto consists.

"There is gusto in the coloring of Titian. Not only do his heads seem to think—his bodies seem to feel. . . . His flesh-color seems alive all over; not merely to have the look and texture of flesh, but the feeling in itself. . . . It is as different from that of other painters as the skin is from a piece of white or red drapery thrown over it. . . .

"The infinite quantity of dramatic invention

in Shakespeare takes from his gusto. The power he delights to show is not intense, but discursive. . . . Milton has great gusto. His imagination has a double relish of its objects, an inveterate attachment to the things he describes, and to the words describing them. There is gusto in Pope's compliments, in Dryden's satires, and Prior's tales; and among prose writers Boccaccio and Rabelais had the most of it."

In this we note the quality of one side of Hazlitt's nature. He saw and heard and felt intensely. He was extremely sensitive, and his sensations translated themselves into sentiments of pleasure or pain, and these sentiments were of the utmost importance to him. He lived in them and wrote of them with immense gusto.

Now it is evident that for a man of this sensitive nature, feeling things so keenly, and at least for the moment so deeply, a peaceable and non-combatant life is, in the physicians' phrase, "strongly indicated." If he is drawn into a

conflict, his delight in natural beauty, in art, in curious books, in good tea, will be interrupted. If he is wounded he will suffer horribly. If he is beaten he will never admit it, but will squirm and rage. A man of sentiment should not go in for fighting any more than a thin-skinned man should go in for football.

But it was Hazlitt's misfortune to have, alongside of his naturally keen sentiments, an obstinate pugnacity which impelled him to transform a discussion into a controversy, a controversy into a quarrel, and a quarrel into a conflict *à outrance*. This kept him in hot water, diverted his great gifts to unprofitable uses, lost him many friends, procured him many savage enemies, obscured for a time his real merits as a writer, and generally made a mess of his life.

Let us follow the track of this problematic nature for a while. William Hazlitt was the second son of a learned and devout Unitarian

preacher who emigrated with his family to America in 1783, and sought a church in the orthodox region round about Philadelphia, and then in the Bostonian country where heterodoxy had not yet begun to flourish. Failing in this endeavor, he returned to England, and his little family followed him in 1787, William being then nine years old. His American sojourn apparently left no trace on the boy, except that he noted the taste of barberries, and wrote: "I have it in my mouth still, after an interval of more than thirty years." In the same year Preacher Hazlitt found a small congregation at Wem, in Shropshire, where he remained more than twenty-five years.

At Wem young Hazlitt grew up, going to the day-school, learning rapidly under his father's guidance, imbibing his liberal political views and his fondness for metaphysics, and, I have no doubt, gaining that familiarity with the English Bible which is the basis of excellence in so

many of our best prose writers. But the boy was no mere book-worm; on the contrary, he was an active, lively and happy fellow, fond of youthful sports, popular and merry.

His elder brother, John, was a portrait painter of considerable promise, and William took much interest in drawing, in which he attained some skill. In his fifteenth year he was sent to the Unitarian College at Hackney, to be trained for the pulpit. At this time he went to spend every Sunday with his brother, whose studio was in London. There his love for the fine arts was encouraged and developed, and he began to think himself born to be a painter. At all events, he found out that he was not born to be a preacher.

He went back to his father's house in 1794 and lived at home for eight years. Reading, thinking, dreaming, taking thirty or forty mile walks in the country, meditating on political systems and metaphysical theories, he seemed,

so far as active work was concerned, to be bewitched and benumbed. He could neither write nor paint. His life was receptive, a vivid medium of sensation and reflection. After his first acquaintance with the works of Rousseau it took on a new coloring. The influence of the great French sentimentalist upon the young man's mind was profound and lasting. From him Hazlitt imbibed his passionate adherence to the doctrine of the rights of man, and at the same time, though unconsciously, his character was touched and tainted by the moral weakness of Rousseau. I quote from one of the essays in *The Round Table* Hazlitt's description of Rousseau, which, though he knew it not, was almost a self-portrait. . . .

"The only quality which he possessed in an eminent degree . . . was extreme sensibility, or an acute and even morbid feeling of all that related to his own impressions, to the objects and events of his life. He had the most intense con-

sciousness of his own existence. No object that had once made an impression on him was ever after effaced. Every feeling in his mind became a passion. His craving after excitement was an appetite and a disease. His interest in his own thoughts and feelings was always wound up to the highest pitch; and hence the enthusiasm which he excited in others. . . . Hence his keen penetration and his strange want of comprehension of mind; for the same intense feeling which enabled him to discern the first principles of things and seize some one view of a subject in all its ramifications, prevented him from admitting the operation of other causes which interfered with his favorite purpose and involved him in needless wilful contradictions. Hence his excessive egotism which filled all objects with himself and would have occupied the universe with his smallest interest. Hence his jealousy and suspicion of others."

In 1798 Hazlitt met Coleridge, and the deep

impression which that marvellous man made on him has been recorded in his essays. One effect of it, unless I am mistaken, was the encouragement which it gave to Hazlitt's idea that he was destined to be a great metaphysician. He imagined that he had made a discovery in philosophy, and labored for years on a little book entitled *The Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind.*

In 1802, however, he had fully resolved to be a painter, and went to Paris to live with his brother. Here he studied in the Louvre and copied the old masters. Then he came back to England and for three years was a peripatetic painter of portraits. Among others, he painted two poor heads of Wordsworth and Southey, a good one of his own father, and one of Charles Lamb which now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London. Though not a great painter, Hazlitt had considerable talent and might have made a living by his brush, if he had persevered.

In 1808 he married Miss Sarah Stoddart, and went to live in a cottage belonging to her, in the secluded village of Winterslow. There some of his happiest days were passed, and there in later years he did some of his best writing. His son was born in 1811. In 1812, the Hazlitts went to live in London.

Here begins a new chapter,—or rather, a new volume in his life. The times were stormy. The reaction from the early enthusiasm which the French Revolution had excited among liberal thinkers in England had brought the ultra-conservatives into power. Many of the young men who had set out as Republicans had become Tories. Political animosities were hot and strong. Napoleon was execrated and feared as the enemy of England and mankind.

With Hazlitt, however, the revolutionary idea persisted, and he saw in Napoleon the survival of that idea, the incarnation, in questionable shape it is true, but still the incarnation, of the spirit

which sought to evoke a new world by overthrowing the old. Napoleon became Hazlitt's idol. He was always ready to defend him against all comers. Throwing himself into the life of London as a public lecturer, a writer for the press, a reporter of Parliamentary debates, Hazlitt made himself known as a partisan of the liberal cause, an opponent of the government, a radical. This brought him into odium with the other side. It was not possible that a man who despised William Pitt and praised Napoleon should be popular in London in 1814.

Hazlitt was well abused, and he hit back, and hit hard. Gifford called him "a sour Jacobin," "a slanderer of the human race," "a slang-whanger"; and said "if the creature, in his endeavor to crawl into the light, must take his way over the tombs of illustrious men, disfiguring the records of their greatness with the slime and filth which mark his track, it is right to point out to him that he may be flung back into the situation

in which nature designed that he should grovel." *Blackwood's Magazine* described him as an ulcer, and said that his books were "a gaping sore of wounded feeling and vanity."

Hazlitt relieved his mind in a published "Letter to William Gifford, Esquire," which is a monument of invective, written in a style so trenchant that it seems likely to survive the best that Gifford ever wrote.

Meanwhile Hazlitt's literary activity was increasing. He brought out book after book full of brilliant essays and penetrating criticisms. His style seemed to have suddenly acquired a marvellous richness and maturity. He became a contributor to the *Edinburgh Review* and the *London Magazine*. He was dramatic critic for the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner*. He made a good living for that day, three or four thousand dollars a year, with his pen and by his lectures. I name some of his titles: *On the Love of Life; On the Love of the Country; On Beauty;*

On Different Sorts of Fame; On the Ignorance of the Learned; On People with One Idea; On Vulgarity and Affectation; On Familiar Style; Why Distant Objects Please; On Going A Journey.

Let us read from a couple of these essays.

On Familiar Style:

"It is not easy to write a familiar style. Many people mistake a familiar for a vulgar style and suppose that to write without affectation is to write at random. On the contrary there is nothing that requires more precision, and, if I may say so, purity of expression, than the style I am speaking of. . . . Out of eight or ten words equally common, equally intelligible, . . . it is a matter of some nicety and discrimination to pick out the very one the preferableness of which is scarcely perceptible, but decisive. . . . The proper force of words lies not in the words themselves, but in their application. . . . I hate anything that occupies more space than it is

worth. I hate to see a load of [empty] bandboxes go along the street, and I hate to see a parcel of big words without anything in them. [Here Hazlitt breaks into delightful praise of Lamb's *Essays*.] There is an inward unction, a marrowy vein both in the thought and feeling, an intuition, deep and lively, of his subject, that carries off any quaintness or awkwardness arising from an antiquated style and dress. . . . I must confess that what I like best of his papers under the signature of Elia is the account of *Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist*, which is also the most free from obsolete allusions and turns of expression."

On Going A Journey:

(To Dr. Samuel Johnson this title might have suggested a rapid post-chaise with a pretty companion beside him. To us it suggests a luxurious express-train, a palatial steamship, or a well-cushioned automobile. To Hazlitt it meant no more costly apparatus than an old, easy jacket,

a stout pair of shoes, and a walking-stick.) Hear him:

"Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three-hours march to dinner, —and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the point of yonder rolling cloud I plunge into my past being, and revel there, as the sun-burnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore. . . . Is not this wild rose sweet without a comment? Does not this daisy leap to my heart?"

Here is gusto for you! And how familiar! Gained at how small expense! It is hard to think of a man of sentiment like this plunged into domestic disagreements, political strifes, and heart-harrowing ruptures with his friends. Yet so it was, because his pugnacity was incorrigible. His temper was seared by hostility; sol-

itude became his refuge and strife his habit; he cased himself in the armor of wrath, through which at times he could not feel even the kindness of his friends.

If you had asked them for an explanation, perhaps they might have given some such answer as this: "Poor Hazlitt! He has cut loose from us because he will not believe that we still admire and love him, in spite of the differences of opinion that have come between us. He will not allow that we are honest in our change of views about the French Revolution and the best way to serve the cause of liberty. We must continue to think as he thinks, or be reviled as turncoats. We must worship Napoleon as he does, or bear the reproach of treason. We must take up his every quarrel, or stand rebuked as his secret enemies. We shall always admire his genius, and be glad of his friendship. But we can not help him as much as we would because he will not let us."

If you had asked him for an explanation, doubtless he would have answered somewhat as follows: "My early friends, Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth and the rest, abandoned the cause of 'liberty, equality, and fraternity,' in which we were enlisted together. They went over to the side of conservatism and tyranny. Therefore I broke with them and exposed their weakness. My enemies, Gifford and Lockhart and the rest, were paid by the Tories to attack my reputation and destroy my influence. The world took sides with them. I had to defend myself. But the real spirit of my resistance was loyalty to the cause of freedom, to which I, almost alone, was faithful, and which I never would surrender or betray." In each of these explanations a candid judge would find a certain amount of truth, though not the whole truth.

At one time Hazlitt sought escape from the conflict within him and about him, in the fool's refuge of hard liquor. But as it injured his

health, he broke off the habit and became a total abstainer from alcohol. For this he made up by an intemperate use of the strongest tea, which no doubt intoxicated him in another way and helped to increase his moody morosity and irascible temper.

I think it was on strong tea that he wrote the essay called "The Fight," which appears among his *Fugitive Writings*, and is the most vivid description in the English language of a battle in the prize-ring.

In 1819 he found that his wife, who appears not to have been at all sentimental, had the dreadful fault of incompatibility, so he separated from her. She seems to have been a woman of accommodating notions, for in 1822 they went to Edinburgh to get a Scotch divorce by collusion. This was done to leave Hazlitt free to marry the daughter of his lodging-house keeper, for whom he had conceived a sentimental amour. But the girl was a chilly, hypo-

critical, and mawkish flirt. When he returned from his curious Scotch journey she jilted him to marry another man. Out of this strange episode Hazlitt made a sickening, sentimental book called *Liber Amoris*. One or two years later he married a widow with some property, from whom he separated the next year.

In spite of these vagaries, Hazlitt continued writing, and writing at times with extraordinary brilliancy. *The Spirit of the Age*, a series of contemporary portraits, published in 1825, is full of good work. There are some excellent essays in *The Plain Speaker*, 1826. A passage from one of these later essays will take the bad taste of *Liber Amoris* out of our mouths. The paper is a description of a conversation among friends, in Charles Lamb's rooms in Mitre Court. Lamb suggested the subject of the talk:

Of Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen.

Ayrton guessed that Lamb's choice would be Sir Isaac Newton and John Locke. But Lamb

stammered, "No, because they were not really persons,—only great names." He said he would rather have seen Sir Thomas Browne and Fulke Greville, because "their writings are riddles, and they themselves the most mysterious of personages,"—which sounds something like our present theme of "problematic natures." So the discussion goes on. Chaucer is named, and Dr. Donne, and Dante, and Columbus, and Oliver Cromwell, and Judas Iscariot, and many others, with ingenious arguments *pro* and *con.* Then Lamb speaks again. "There is only one other person I can ever think of after this. If Shakespeare was to come into this room, we should all rise up to meet him. But if that person was to come into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of his garment."

Hazlitt's *Life of Napoleon,* in four volumes, 1827–1830, was a failure, not because it was ill written, but because it was a work of blind hero-worship.

By this time Hazlitt was very ill, poor, and most of the time lonely. He died in his lodgings, ministered to by a few faithful friends, among whom were his own son and Charles Lamb. Hazlitt's pathetic last words were: "Well, I have had a happy life."

PROBLEMATIC NATURES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

VIII

A KNIGHT ERRANT OF DREAMS

A KNIGHT ERRANT OF DREAMS

SO far as I can see, the English poet Shelley owed little or nothing of his genius to the great god Heredity. His grandfather, Bysshe Shelley, was a tall, handsome adventurer who acquired great wealth and lived for it. Lord Morley wrote that he owed his fortune "entirely to his own exertions." But when we examine those exertions we find that, apart from a brief career as a quack doctor in America, his chief labors consisted in marrying two very rich ladies,—successively of course. He made liberal contributions to the funds of the Whig party and for this, in 1806, he was elevated to the rank of a baronet. This method of ennoblement seems not unlike that by which some Americans gain,

or at least seek, elevation to the United States Senate. So perhaps we are not altogether so different "to" the British as (in their quaint phrase) some of them assert.

The poet's father, Sir Timothy Shelley, was a thick-headed, conventional, obstinate, half-illiterate squire, who affected the manner of Lord Chesterfield in correspondence and the principles of George IV in morality, remaining a stout advocate of the Church of England for Sunday use. He was in fact about as well fitted to be the parent of a poet as a turkey-gobbler to play father to a nightingale. He once told his son that he would support any number of illegitimate children, but would never forgive him if he married below him. For one whose father had been a quack doctor and had made an obscure marriage in America before his successful heiress-hunting in England, this showed a curious sense of aristocracy.

The poet's mother, Elizabeth Pilfold, was

a beautiful, narrow-minded, quick-tempered woman, who cared nothing for literature, and was peevish with her son because he cared nothing for field-sports. The sensitive, whimsical, dreamy boy was like a fairy changeling in that family. You can not explain his arrival there unless you assume that the great god Heredity is something of a humorist.

From the first, Percy Bysshe Shelley was a charming, lovable, eccentric apparition. He had gifts but did not know what to do with them. His blue eyes were bright and wild; his face irregular, yet beautiful; his figure slender, yet large-boned; his voice high and thin, often musical but sometimes shrieky. At school he was indifferent to games, bitterly hostile to the tradition of flogging, unpopular with most of the boys and the teachers, but warmly devoted to a few friends. His favorite pursuits were lonely reading and experimental chemistry. In the latter he dabbled recklessly, staining his hands and

clothes, and enlivening the monotony of existence with unexpected explosions.

His chosen books were romances of the fantastic school,—by such authors as "Monk" Lewis, Mrs. Radcliffe, William Godwin. His first flight in literature was a poem on *The Wandering Jew*, —not published. His next was a wildly dull novel called *Zastrozzi*, and his third, perhaps in collaboration with his beloved cousin, Harriet Grove, was a volume entitled *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire*. But it was soon found out that so far from being "original" some of the verse was bodily taken from the writings of "Monk" Lewis. The volume was withdrawn.

In 1811 he brought out another moon-struck romance, *St. Irvyne, or the Rosicrucian*. Meantime he had entered University College, Oxford. Here he formed a close friendship with a singular young man, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, rather a gross, cynical fellow, but devoted to Shelley and curiously interested in all his vagaries,

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
From an old engraving

which now switched from physics to metaphysics. Shelley read voraciously, sometimes fifteen hours a day. He imbibed freely the opinions of Hume and the French materialists; became a glowing radical in politics, an ardent skeptic in religion, and finally published a small, rather dull pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism.* This he very thoughtfully sent to British bishops and all the heads of colleges in Oxford. Result? No conversions that I ever heard of, but prompt expulsion of Shelley from the University in his first year. His furious father forbade him to come home, so he went to London.

Here then we have him at the age of nineteen, launched in a world of which he had no real knowledge, passionately resolved to do two things: to penetrate the secret of the universe, and to upset and reform the social order of mankind. For these rather large tasks his equipment was neither learning, nor political power, nor the magic of persuasive speech. Of

these, and of practical experience, he never had even a handful. But he had a high heart, and within him a wonderful, undeveloped, I think as yet even unsuspected, power of lyrical poesy, which in the end was to win him a great victory though not of the kind that he foresaw. Thus he went forth fearless to his adventures, sad and splendid; fighting and embracing shadows, yet ever drawing nearer to a glorious, unknown reality; a problematic nature, a very Knight Errant of Dreams.

Of his wanderings in England and Ireland, his efforts to arouse and reform the populace by throwing his pamphlets out of the window at them, his various experiments and experiences as a downpuller and uplifter, it is not needful for our present purpose that I should write. His own account of them is weird and incoherent and full of inconsistent statements, for which reason some people have called him a congenital liar. He was nothing of the kind. He was a

vivid dreamer, like Poe, unable to distinguish between imagination and memory, prone to confuse his fancies with the facts.

He was never a sensualist. His tastes were simple and almost childlike. His favorite food was bread-and-milk. For a while he was a strict vegetarian, until he found that this diet injured his health. He was not at all like Byron, except in the passion for liberty. He was full of sincere philanthropy, ready to feed a beggar-child with his own hands, or to give his last shilling to a poor man. He really loved humanity, but he hardly knew human nature at all, because he had no sense of its natural weakness and limitations, and quite ignored the great realities of original sin and divine grace, though both of them were manifestly present within him and around him. Thus chivalrously walking among his visions, he made many mistakes, brought wounds and sorrows upon himself, and wrought unwitting harm to others.

The big blot upon his conduct was his treatment of Harriet Westbrook, his first wife. Of this Edward Dowden has written with indiscreet discretion, in the biography of Shelley authorized by the family. Like most authorized biographies of the Prince Albert period in England, it is shockingly reticent in regard to the realities. Mark Twain dealt vigorously with them in his essay called *In Defence of Harriet Shelley;* and André Maurois has served them up very Frenchily in his recent book, *Ariel.*

Harriet was a beautiful school-girl, the daughter of a coffee-house keeper, called "Jew" Westbrook. She was sixteen years old when she met the visionary young reformer of the world. She fell in love with him, and he apparently with her, being moved by her story of unhappiness at home. They talked philosophy, atheism, politics and social uplift, and finally they ran away together to York, and so on to Edinburgh, where they had a convenient Scotch marriage. At first

they were happy in a rambling life of poverty. Shelley's daughter Ianthe was born. His terrible sister-in-law Eliza and his eccentric friend Hogg lived with the young couple off and on.

Domestic discontent began to appear, and Shelley's garden of love was not the perfect Eden that he had dreamed. After nearly three years of it, and but a few months before the birth of his second child, Shelley fell abruptly into love with another sixteen-year-old girl, the daughter of the radical money-borrowing philosopher, William Godwin. Leaving Harriet to bear and look after his baby, the young knight errant of dreams eloped to France with charming little Mary Godwin. It was his avowed theory that marriage was a mockery after love had ceased. He failed to see that the real mockery lies in a love which ceases after marriage. At the mercy of such love, society would become a chaos of misery.

Two years after he left her, Shelley's deserted

wife drowned herself. Any one not lost in dreams, any one who knew the least bit about human nature as it is, would have foreseen this tragedy. But to Shelley it brought a shock of surprise and sorrow which recurred at intervals throughout his dreamy life. When he claimed possession of the children, Lord Eldon, before whom the suit in Chancery was brought, refused to give them into the father's control, on the ground that not only had Shelley's conduct been immoral, but he had justified it as worthy to be imitated, and was therefore unfit to be entrusted with the care and education of children.

For the false opinions which led to this deplorable catastrophe in Shelley's life, William Godwin, one of the most pernicious sophists who ever seduced the minds of men with clever arguments and professions of high philanthropy, while his own life was selfish, mean and inconsistent, was largely responsible. Shelley called him "the regulator and former of my mind."

But his shallow utilitarianism, which made each man the judge of virtue and based all morality upon happiness, was really the influence that confused Shelley's mind, hindered the full development of his genius, and nearly wrecked his life.

After the death of Harriet, Shelley was regularly married to Mary, in 1816. In the meantime, amid much desultory and futile political activity, absurd attempts at agitation in Ireland, publishing of pamphlets and writing of letters, he began to work his way toward his true vocation of poetry.

Queen Mab, a crude, pantheistic poem, was privately printed in 1813.* It contained some touches of beauty, but as a whole it was immature and shapeless. When it was pirated in 1821, Shelley disdained, and wished to suppress it. *Alastor*, the first real expression of his slowly unfolding genius, was published in 1816. It

**How wonderful is Death,*
Death and his brother Sleep! etc.

is a musical piece of blank verse, uttering the passionate intellectual curiosity of his nature, and describing the solitude and sorrow of the soul, seeking to find ideal loveliness in an embodied form. The *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, printed in 1817, deals with the same theme. It is vague but exquisite. He calls upon the Spirit of Beauty,

"The awful shadow of some unseen Power,"

to the quest of whom he has dedicated his life, to calm and harmonize his future years and bind him, by solemn spells,

"To fear himself, and love all humankind."

The Revolt of Islam, (first published in 1818, under the title *Laon and Cythna; or The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century*,) expresses Shelley's political and social dreams. It is a long and intricate tale, in the Spenserian stanza, of a successful revolt against tyranny, in an impossible city, un-

der the leadership of a beautiful and improbable youth, and his yet more ethereal wife. (In the first version of the story, she was also his own sister.) After the downfall of the tyrant, the liberators hold a great festival, with songs and speeches, but apparently take no precautions to establish the new order or to defend liberty. Naturally the tyrant comes back, with armies, slaughters the people, restores the old oppression, and finally, after tremendous complications, burns Laon and his sister-bride on the same funeral pyre. The world sinks back into its ancient superstition and misery; while the souls of the lovers go floating, in an enchanted boat, into Paradise. The poem has many lovely passages; but as a whole it is incoherent, visionary, unreal; one searches it in vain for a clear conception of freedom or a practicable plan of a better future for the world.

In 1818 Shelley went to Italy and there spent the brief remainder of his life, moving about

from place to place, and finally settling down at Pisa. His existence was wayward and wandering, yet never sensual or selfish. Swift and sudden raptures of joy came to him, like dreams; but

"The sober certainty of waking bliss"

was never his. His friendships were intense, but they did not wear well. Even his love for Mary began to wane. It no longer satisfied him. He wrote of his "cold home," and said that he wearied of "acting a forced part in life's dull scene." (*Lines to Edward Williams*, 1821.)

In fact, Shelley's ideal of love was too intense, too absolute, ever to be realized on earth. Nothing but a complete mingling of two lives in one, an actual identification of two spirits

"Confused in passion's golden purity"

would content him.

This dream finds expression in *Epipsychidion*, (Greek for "This soul out of my soul,") a very

beautiful but utterly absurd poem, addressed to an Italian countess, Emilia Viviani. He describes in lovely verse a lady fair as the Moon, (probably Mary,) and another lady clear as the Sun, (certainly Emily,) and speaks of them as

"Twin Spheres of light who rule this passive Earth,
This world of love, this *me*."

He speaks also of another lady,—

"O Comet, beautiful and fierce,
Who drew the heart of this frail Universe
Towards thine own,"

(who can this be?) and implores her to "float into our azure heaven again," and promises that the Sun-lady will feed her with golden fire, and Moon will "veil her horn in thy last smiles," while the poet, we suppose, will bask and expand in his triple astronomical beatitude. With celestial bodies? Yes, possibly. But with bodies terrestrial of the female sex? No, hardly. Three are too many.

But Shelley goes on dreaming.

"Emily,
A ship is floating in the harbour now,
A wind is hovering o'er the mountain's brow;
There is a path on the sea's azure floor—
No keel has ever ploughed that path before;
The halcyons brood around the foamless isles;
The treacherous Ocean has forsworn its wiles;
The merry mariners are bold and free:
Say, my heart's sister, wilt thou sail with me?"

No, Emily will not. In the first place, there is Mary to be considered. In the second place, Emily has to marry a Signor Biondi. A little later, Shelley writes: "The *Epipsychidion* I can not look at; the person whom it celebrates was a cloud instead of a Juno, and poor Ixion starts from the centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace."

Shelley's pure lyrics are wonderful, delicate, musical, for example:

"I arise from dreams of thee,—"

"Swiftly walk o'er the western wave,
Spirit of Night,—"

"Music, when soft voices die,—"

"One word is too often profaned
For me to profane it,—"

"When the lamp is shattered,—"

and the *Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples.* But it is in the more prolonged lyric that Shelley strikes his clearest note and attains the most unique expression of his genius. *Arethusa* and *The Cloud* are wonderful pieces of nature-music. *Lines Written Among the Euganæan Hills, An Ode to the West Wind,* and *To a Skylark* are as perfect in their way as anything ever written. The causes of this are evident. Nature endowed him with the incommunicable gift of song. He held the inspirational theory of poetry, that it comes from the "evanescent visitation" of a power that "rises from within like the colour of a flower, which changes and fades as it is developed." Thus the lyric, the record of a moment of intense feel-

ing, was his natural field. For the more sustained and comprehensive forms of poetry he lacked patience and continuity of thought.

Of dramas Shelley wrote two that stand out, though imperfect. *Prometheus Unbound* is a dramatic presentation of Shelley's passion for reforming the world. It moves in an imaginary realm peopled with allegorical personages, and is, in fact, a modern miracle-play. Prometheus represents loving and suffering Humanity; Asia, the spirit of love in Nature, from whom Prometheus has been separated by the cruelty of Jupiter, and chained to a rock in the Caucasus. Jupiter is the tyrant God of Superstition; not the almighty, merciful God. Asia seeks Demogorgon, a vague, inexplicable being, representing, perhaps, the eternal wisdom, and asks whether Prometheus shall be freed. Demogorgon answers that the hour is coming. He goes to Jupiter and hurls him from his throne. Prometheus is unbound by Hercules. In the same

hour all thrones are emptied, all altars abandoned,

> "Man remains
> Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
> Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
> Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
> Over himself; just, gentle, wise."

Prometheus and Asia retire into a cave; various spirits appear and sing very beautifully; Demogorgon pronounces the epilogue.

As a millennial dream the drama is fine. But it has no real relation to the life of man, nor to the true dramatic theme, the conflict between passion and duty. Imagine the actual effect of the arrival of Demogorgon in one of our United States; the sudden disappearance of the governor and the legislature and all the judges and all the policemen; the closing of all churches and the opening of all prisons. Would the Golden Age promptly begin? I fear not.

The Cenci is a tragedy of terror based upon the story of a certain Roman nobleman, who con-

ceived an incestuous passion for his own daughter, and was killed by assassins, at her command. The theme shows the fascination which the horrible had for Shelley's mind. He works it out with an intensity unrivalled since the Elizabethan dramatists. But the drama has two faults. The subject is too nakedly hideous; and there is no gradation of character, both the evil and the good being too absolutely presented.

I note in Shelley's work a general tendency in this direction. He knows but two kinds of beings: angels and devils. Most of his angels are young; most of his devils are old. He has a profound prejudice against age, arising perhaps from his unhappy experience and bitter quarrels with his father.

In the field of elegy, Shelley produced only a single poem, but it is immortal. He had been among the first to recognize the genius of John Keats, had cordially praised his work, and though they were never intimate, had shown

much kindness toward him. When the news came in March, 1821, that Keats had died in Rome, and that his death was ascribed to the mortification and despair caused by a harsh, unjust criticism of his poems, printed in the *Quarterly Review*, Shelley's genius was stirred by a passion of pity for the life so soon cut off, of sympathy for the neglected and suffering poet, of indignation at the brutal cruelty of a dullard world. This passion flowered in *Adonais*, Shelley's richest poem, and one of the world's great elegies. As a work of art, it comes close to perfection. The tender grace of movement, mournful and musical, with which he leads us to the grave of the youngest, dearest son of Urania; the skill with which he weaves through the stanzas his picture of Keats, the singing shepherd of quick Dreams, the brother of the nightingale, the lover of

"Desires and Adorations,
Wingèd Persuasions and veiled Destinies,

Splendours, and glooms, and glimmering Incarnations
Of hopes and fears, and twilight Fantasies;—"

the deep sense of the pathetic brevity of life and the mystery of death; the keen flash of anger at those who had mocked and wounded the young poet; the noble flight with which the verse soars upward into a calmer region and sings of Nature's loveliness which absorbs him, and fame's immortality which awaits him, and the world of light into which his soul has entered,—these most rare and excellent things give this elegy a high place among the imperishable monuments of poetry. If we would know how far Shelley had advanced from the crude materialism of his youth, we need only to read these closing stanzas of *Adonais*.

"Peace, peace! He is not dead, he doth not sleep—
He hath awakened from the dream of life—
'Tis we, who, lost in stormy vision, keep
With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
And in mad trance strike with our spirit's knife
Invulnerable nothings. . . .

"The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments. . . .

"The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are."

Prophetic music! On July 8, 1822, Shelley set sail from Leghorn in his cranky little boat with his friend Williams and a young sailor, to make the familiar voyage to his summer home on the Bay of Spezia. A violent thunderstorm descended, riving "the spherèd skies," and bearing the frail craft "darkly, fearfully, afar." It was never seen again.

The bodies of Shelley and Williams were found, ten days afterwards, on the beach near

Via Reggio, and buried in the sand. A month later, a little group of friends, Byron, Leigh Hunt, Captain Shenly, Trelawney, disinterred the body of Williams and burned it on a funeral pyre. The next day the same ceremony was repeated for Shelley. A little company of soldiers and some peasants from the neighborhood watched the strange rite. Slowly the bright fire mounted to eat away the flesh and bones. After three hours the body fell apart and the heart was seen unconsumed. Trelawney rescued it from the flames. It was given by Leigh Hunt to Mary Shelley and at last found rest in English ground. The remaining ashes were gathered in an oaken casket and buried in the Protestant Cemetery at Rome, beside the dark pyramid of Caius Cestius, and close to the grave of "Adonais." On the tombstone is written:

Percy Bysshe Shelley
Cor Cordium

PROBLEMATIC NATURES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

IX

A DYSPEPTIC PROPHET

A DYSPEPTIC PROPHET

THE English-speaking world in the second quarter of the nineteenth century stood in dire need of a prophet,—a man with a message from on high and lips touched with a live coal of fire. Of cogitators and arguers, that age of old William IV and young Queen Victoria had a plenty, —Bentham, Godwin, John Stuart Mill, the vivacious Cobbett, the solemn Sir William Hamilton were all writing or talking. In romance, Scott was still at work though crippled, Dickens and Thackeray had emerged, Bulwer was in full swing. In poetry, Wordsworth was in the sere and yellow leaf, but still bearing a little fruit; Thomas Campbell had gleaned his scanty harvest; Moore had turned from verse to prose; Southey had done the same; Rogers, that hardy perennial, was living on *The Pleasures of Mem-*

ory; but Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning had begun; Tennyson had written his two volumes of 1842, which carried him into the heart of England and America; and on this side of the water, Longfellow, Poe and Lowell were singing. Not bad, for the derided Early Victorian Epoch!

But of prophets, men with fire in their bones and strong words on their tongues, there was at first a dearth. 'The word of the Lord was rare in those days, there was no open vision.' Then came Emerson, and Carlyle, a pair of prophets, and deep friends for more than forty years.

On the surface they were not alike. Emerson certainly was not, and Carlyle assuredly was, a problematic nature. His conflict did not arise from a contradiction within his spirit, but from a strife between the spirit and the flesh, the spirit being enthusiastically willing and the flesh being distressfully weak, so that he was often tempted to cry with St. Paul, "Wretched

man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

The cause of this weakness was not sensuality, gluttony, or inebriety,—never a man more free from these lusts than Carlyle. It was something to which even the strictest of puritans can hardly attach any severe moral blame. Indeed many of the puritans have themselves suffered from this same infirmity and have made others suffer because of it, not fully knowing what they did. It was in fact nothing more nor less than dyspepsia,—that demon whose favorite prey is men of intelligence too much given to brain work, and whose seat of power is in the abdomen or centre of the body from which he extends his malign torturing influence to the tips of the toes and the ends of the fingers and finally, by a poisonous magic, to the mind itself and the very disposition of the man.

Many a happy home has this demon Dyspepsia brought to confusion, and some to ultimate

wreck. Many a strong thinker has he driven into the wilderness to gash himself with the rocks of delusion or to wander in the waste places of pessimism. Some good Christians even he has led out of the paths of peace into the ways of bitterness, and turned those who might have been saints into irritable and self-righteous bigots. Dyspepsia is an uncomfortable affliction for any man, a messenger of Satan, a thorn in the flesh. But to a prophet, one who has a high mission to proclaim divine truth to his fellow-men without fear or favor, dyspepsia is doubly distressing, hostile, and dangerous.

While Thomas Carlyle was a country lad in the little cottage of his father the stone-mason, at Ecclefechan in the south of Scotland, growing in the open air and sharing in the healthy physical "chores" which were the athletics of the poor in those times, he showed no dyspeptic symptoms. Being by far the cleverest of the family, he was predestined, in true Scottish fash-

ion, to the ministry, and sent in 1814 to the University of Edinburgh, to prepare. Incredible were the sacrifices made by the family for this sacred purpose. His mother, a devout and loving peasant, painfully learned writing in order that she might send letters to her boy Thomas.

But his life in the Scottish Athens was hard and not healthful. He was irregular in his scanty meals and intemperate in his rich studies. He read prodigiously, toiled fiercely especially in mathematics, and accumulated a solid mass of knowledge, deep imbedded in which was a rocky conviction that he was not called to the church but to another kind of service.

In the interim he went in for teaching, as so many ambitious poor boys have done. It was while he was a none-too-successful dominie at Kirkaldy that he fell in love with Miss Margaret Gordon, a sweet and sensible girl, who gave him good advice but declined to marry him. Here

it became only too plain that dyspepsia, taking advantage of the inward disorder and weakness caused by too much brain-work, too little body-work, and scant irregular feeding, had pounced upon him and marked him for its own. That demon-rat, gnawing at the pit of his stomach, refused to be cast out. The wretched youth swallowed heroic doses of medicine. No better! Took to tobacco as a relief, instead of Coleridge's opium. No better! A doctor told him that it was the cause of his trouble. Not so! Carlyle records his experience, in his own inimitable style. "Gave it up, and found that I might as well have poured my sorrows into the long hairy ear of the first jackass I came upon, as of this select medical man." So he took up his pipe again and settled down to live and fight with his internal enemy for the rest of his years, which were many; for the trouble with dyspepsia, like seasickness, is that it does *not* kill you, at least not quickly.

At first he was hard hit by the enemy, and near surrender to the devil of pessimism. Worn down by bodily distress and mental anguish, he was losing faith in God and confidence in himself. He says that he felt "immured in a rotten carcass, every avenue of which is chained into an inlet of pain, till my intellect is obscured and weakened, and my head and heart are alike desolate and dark." The crisis of the struggle came in June, 1821, when he was in his twenty-sixth year. He described it, ten years later, in his strange mystical book, *Sartor Resartus.*

"I lived in a continual, indefinite, pining fear. Full of such humour, . . . was I, one sultry Dog-day . . . toiling along the dirty little *Rue Saint-Thomas de l'Enfer* . . . when all at once there rose a Thought in me, and I asked myself, 'What *art* thou afraid of? . . . Despicable biped! what is the sum-total of the worst that lies before thee? . . . Canst thou not suffer whatsoever it be; and, as a Child of Freedom, though

outcast, trample Tophet itself under thy feet, while it consumes thee? Let it come, then; I will meet and defy it.' . . . Ever from that time, the temper of my misery was changed; not Fear or whining Sorrow was it, but Indignation and grim fire-eyed Defiance. Thus had the Everlasting No (*das ewige Nein*) pealed authoritatively through all the recesses of my being. . . . The Everlasting No had said: 'Behold, thou art fatherless, outcast, and the Universe is mine (the Devil's)': to which my whole Me now made answer: '*I* am not thine, but Free, and forever hate thee!' It is from this hour that I incline to date my Spiritual New-birth, or Baphometic Fire-baptism; perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a Man."

Such is Carlyle's account of his victory in single combat with Spirit of Denial, the ghastly Negation that life is worth living, the Devil that haunts the caverns of Dyspepsia. The passage is so familiar that it hardly needs quot-

ing. But the corresponding chapter on the Positive Spirit, the assertion of the real values of life, "the Everlasting Yea," is less familiar and more important. There are three high mountain peaks of faith in it.

First, Nature is the Living Garment of God. "Sweeter than Dayspring to the Shipwrecked in Nova Zembla; ah, like the mother's voice to her little child that strays bewildered, weeping, in unknown tumults; like soft streamings of celestial music to my too-exasperated heart, came that Evangel. The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres; but godlike, and my Father's!"

Second, the end of life is not Happiness but something higher, Blessedness. "I asked myself: What is this that, ever since thy earliest years, thou hast been fretting and fuming and lamenting and self-tormenting, on account of? Say it in a word: is it not because thou art not *Happy?* . . . Foolish soul! What Act of

Legislature was there that *thou* shouldest be Happy? . . . Art thou nothing other than a Vulture, then, that fliest through the Universe seeking after somewhat to *eat;* and shrieking dolefully because carrion enough is not given thee? Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe. . . . Love not Pleasure; love God." (This paragraph may be specially commended to writers of the Damitall School of Fiction, and young men who come to college under the guidance of the great Bunkum, in order to become accomplished cynics.)

The third high point in Carlyle's "Everlasting Yea" is his gospel of Work. "*Do the Duty which lies nearest thee,* which thou knowest to be a Duty! Thy second Duty will already have become clearer. . . . Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it, in God's name! 'Tis the utmost thou hast in thee: out with it, then. Up, up! Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it

with thy whole might." This is sound doctrine, —a step beyond Goethe's *Entsagen.*

Now in pursuing his flight through the dyspeptic vapors and contrary winds which beset him, toward these high and sunlit peaks of a working faith, young Carlyle was greatly helped by his warm friendship with the eloquent preacher Edward Irving, ("but for him I had never known what the communion of man with man means,") and by his love for Jane Welsh, a sparkling, ambitious, clever Scotch girl, of no regular type of beauty but of wonderful feminine charm, which is much more rare and precious than cold beauty. She was "a vital spark of living flame," and had many suitors, one of whom was Edward Irving, who was hindered from marrying her only by the ties of honorable engagement which bound him to another girl. Carlyle fell heir to his friend's sweetheart. Four years of ardent courtship and intellectual correspondence won her deep love and her con-

sent to marry him. By this time he had visited London, Birmingham, Paris, and had gained a precarious footing in the world of letters and a small income from his *Life of Schiller* and his translations from Goethe, Richter, and other German authors. Thomas and Jane were married on October 17th, 1826. For eighteen months they lived at Comely Bank, Edinburgh, where they both suffered from poverty, poor health, and irritated nerves, and Thomas began a footless novel called *Wotton Reinfred* which he never finished, because it was an impossible book. Carlyle tried to get a professorship in London University and St. Andrews, but failed in both efforts.

Among the small property to which Jane Welsh was heir, there was a bleak house on a barren farm, called Craigenputtock. It stood on a dreary moorland, seven hundred feet above sea-level, sixteen miles from a lemon and a post-office. As a girl she had declared that 'she would

not live there with an angel,' but now she agreed to do it with a dyspeptic, in order that the beloved Thomas might have solitude and silence around him for the writing of his new book, the famous *Sartor Resartus*. It was a brave thing for Jane to do. Of solitude and hard housework she got a bit too much, but of silence no doubt she relieved the pressure by sharp and witty utterance of her thoughts about the business of solitude and hard housework as an exclusive diet for a young and charming woman.

For Thomas, however, Craigenputtock was good in a physical way. Horseback-riding and brisk long hikes across the moorland, wild ground underfoot and bright stars overhead, produced a great improvement in his health. To this period belongs some of his finest and clearest work: the splendid essays on *Burns*, *Dr. Samuel Johnson*, *Voltaire*, and *Characteristics*. These are written in a style which is at the same time forceful and intelligible, original but not

eccentric. After our recent experiences with some of the modern dadaistic writers, Carlyle's early essays seem lucid and sane. But the new wine of mysticism, radicalism, democracy, was fermenting within him, and in *Sartor Resartus* it fairly burst the old bottle. It is a wild, weird book in form; a strong, stimulating book in spirit; fantastically built and covered with verbal gargoyles; a grotesque presentation of a high moral philosophy; a strange mixture of sentiment, satire, comedy, and preaching.

The central idea of the book, taken from Dean Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, may be stated as follows: The universe is an immense suit of clothes, which covers everything. Man himself is a microcoat, with trimmings. Hence comes the title of the book, *Sartor Resartus*, the Tailor Re-tailored. In plan it is a series of imaginary extracts from a work on the clothes-philosophy, by a German professor named Teufelsdröckh, (which means "devil's dung,") interspersed with

fragments of the biography of the professor, and notes by the English editor. The names of places and persons are fantastic inventions: *Entepfuhl*, "duck puddle"; *Hinterschlag*, "spanking"; *Heuschrecke*, "grasshopper"; *Zähdarm*, "tough-gut," (the opposite of dyspeptic); *Weiss-nicht-wo*, "Don't know where."

With this roughly tied-up bundle of genius in hand, Carlyle borrowed fifty pounds and went up to London in August 1831 to find a publisher. Not so easy! Fraser said he would publish it if Carlyle would pay him one hundred and fifty pounds. Impossible! Longman politely declined it. Discouraging! John Murray accepted it, and then sent it back, being frightened. Detestable! Jane Carlyle came up to join Thomas in October, and as he said, "wrapped his bleeding heart with the softest of bandages." His father died in January 1832, and by April the Carlyles were back on the lonely farm again, rather the worse for wear, Thomas nursing his

spleen against the London *literati*, Jane consoling him and sure as ever that *Sartor* was "a work of genius."

So it was, but it had to wait, and that was hard on a dyspeptic author. At long last, in 1833, Fraser accepted it for serial publication in his magazine, but at forty dollars a sheet less than Carlyle's usual price. This also was bad for dyspepsia. *Sartor* first came out as a book, in the United States in 1836, under the auspices of Emerson, and with a preface by him.

Meanwhile the Carlyles had taken their courage in both hands and gone up to London to try their fortunes. The "sooty despicabilities" of Craigenputtock were forsaken, the furniture, cattle, and poultry sold out, and the impecunious Scots found a home in Chelsea at Number 5 Cheyne Row. The London public had received *Sartor* with almost "universal disapprobation." Many withdrew their subscriptions to *Fraser's Magazine* while that incomprehensible serial was

running. Funds were low, work scarce, society cold. Not a penny did Carlyle earn with his pen during two years. He said bitterly, "Literature will never yield bread, *nor stomach to digest bread.*" There spoke the demon of his inwards.

He was working with fierce intensity on his history of *The French Revolution.* Having finished the first volume, he lent the uncopied manuscript to his friend Mill. Mill lent it to a lady-friend, and the lady's housemaid, dusting around, took it for waste paper and burned it. Frightful catastrophe! But Carlyle faced it with desperate valor, and re-wrote the volume through months of bodily and mental anguish, "mind weary, body very sick, little black specks dancing to and fro in the left eye." On a January night of 1837 the second volume also was finished and he left the completed work with Jane, saying: "I know not whether the book is worth anything . . . but this I could tell the world: You have not had for a hundred years

any book that comes more direct and flamingly from the heart of a living man." Then he dashed out into the night to walk off his excitement.

The book had, and deserved, a prompt and enormous success. Carlyle became the literary lion of London. Ended for him was poverty, but not dyspepsia. It stuck to him like the evil spirit in the parable, leaving him now and then for a brief vacation, but surely coming back again to its deserted house. Some relief he got by horseback exercise, better medical care, an improved diet, and a strong stimulant of social admiration. His lectures attracted brilliant audiences, and one of the three courses, *Heroes and Hero-worship*, was very successful as a book. But none of these things could dislodge the interior devil. Thomas suffered, and complained, and suffered more. Jane suffered with him and for him. To her, housecleaning was a fine necessity, to him it was a calamitous earthquake.

Noise of any kind irritated him to fury. The chickens in a neighbor's yard were maddening "demon fowls." Any domestic mishap made him growl like a bear with a sore head, and to these growls poor Jane was likely to reply with wit and acerbity. The wit aggravated him, as a wife's wit often displeases a sulky husband, and the acerbity made him worse. He built a sound-proof room to work in, but when any noise disturbed him he came out to expatiate on the unattainable blessedness of silence.

Rumors of domestic unhappiness in Number 5 Cheyne Row began to circulate in literary and social London—exaggerated rumors, no doubt, for the *intelligentsia*, having more or less lively imaginations, are always given to picturesque exaggeration, and there is no place where you may hear a half-truth more vividly expanded than in literary clubs and academic circles. But so much smoke means at least a small fire. It is fairly credible that the married life of Jane

and Thomas was not absolutely and entirely happy. Thomas himself said as much in his *Reminiscences*, published after Jane's tragic death, and took all the blame to himself, in an agony of remorse. Well, what would you? Did not Thomas himself say, in *Sartor*, that man should not seek happiness as the end of life?

I have been reading lately a new book called *Jane Welsh and Jane Carlyle*, written by Miss Elizabeth Drew with much sound sense and good humor. She is on Jane's side of course, as she ought to be, but she makes no attempt to conceal the fact that Jane was sometimes more than a bit trying. Miss Drew thinks that James Anthony Froude, Carlyle's injudicious and rather spiteful biographer, made bad use of the material put into his hands, and was over-partial to Jane. I never saw Froude but once. When I was a student in Princeton he came to lecture at the college. All traces of his subject and discourse have faded from my memory. But I re-

call distinctly his extraordinary contortions on the platform. He seemed to be trying to tie his legs into a knot and to thrust himself into the pockets of his own trousers. His biographical work is like that.

It is quite certain that he was responsible for the first circulation of the report that the primary cause of the Carlyles' unhappiness was a physical defect on the part of Carlyle. This alleged fact Froude credits on the authority of an ancient maiden-lady, Miss Caroline Jewsbury, who said with mincing words, "Carlyle was one of those persons who ought never to have married." A male gossip, named Frank Harris, repeated the same story in 1911. But the doctor to whom Harris attributed the story denied it and "laughed it to scorn." There is absolutely no proof whatever for the prurient guess. Even if it were true, many childless couples have been very happy together. If Thomas and Jane were not altogether so, the

explanation is entirely simple. She was a high-strung, nervous creature, and he was a confirmed dyspeptic of the melancholy-irritable type. There you have the whole story. It was enough to drive Carlyle to passionate self-reproach after his wife was taken from him. It should be enough to awaken our deep sympathy and pity for both of them.

But Carlyle's dyspepsia had another and much more important effect. It changed the color of his mind, made him see yellow, and altered the whole tenor and tone of his message as a prophet. At first he was affirmative, hopeful, stimulating, a *yea*-man. But as time went on and bile pervaded him, he became negative, gloomy, despairing, depressing, abusive, a *nay*-man. *Sartor*, with all its concatenated nodosities of thought and expression, is a book of courage and hope. *The French Revolution* is full of sympathetic humanity and liberal enthusiasm. In *Heroes and Hero-worship* we still find

the humane spirit and the power of "admiration, hope, and love." But with *Chartism*, *Past and Present*, *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, we find that the voice and message of our prophet have become raucous, denunciatory, atrabilious. All the good men are dead and Carlyle himself feels decidedly ill. England contains "forty million people, mostly fools; America eighteen million of bores." *Fraser's Magazine*, which printed his *Sartor* when no one else would have it, he calls "the mud magazine," and *Blackwood's* "the sand magazine."

Of John Sterling, his intimate admirer, he remarks that he "had the mind of a kangaroo," and of Cardinal Newman that he "had not the intellect of a moderate-sized rabbit." Of Charles and Mary Lamb, whom he met once, he remarks only that they "smelled of gin"; John Stuart Mill is "a friend frozen in ice for me"; Keble, the author of *The Christian Year*, is "a little ape"; Gladstone, "a spectral kind of phantom, nothing

in him but forms and ceremonies"; Emerson, at first Carlyle's "sky messenger," has now become to him an "apostle of transcendental moonshine."

Of philanthropy, Thomas cries aloud, "O this universal syllabub of philanthropic twaddle! . . . I say sometimes, such a blockhead Idol, and miserable White Mumbojumbo, fashioned out of deciduous sticks and cast clothes, out of extinct cants and modern sentimentalisms, as that which they sing litanies to at Exeter Hall and extensively elsewhere, was perhaps never set up by human folly before!" What a vocabulary! And what bile!

In the American Civil War Carlyle could see nothing better than "the burning of a smoky chimney"; the abolition of slavery seemed to him a silly concession to the laziness of the "nigger"; the honest and manly virtues which he praised in Cromwell he could not recognize in Abraham Lincoln. The failure of democracy, the need of a new aristocracy to rule and run the world and

the improbability of its appearance, appeared to him equally evident and melancholy. His deep religious spirit, in which Calvinism and Mysticism were strangely blended, was never entirely lost. But it was curiously shadowed and be-gloomed. It seemed as if he were repeating the song of the little maid in Browning's *Pippa Passes*, with a sinister variation:

> 'God's in his heaven,
> All's *wrong* with the world.'

Carlyle said his last "Good-bye" to his faithful friends on February 5, 1881. It would be a thousand pities if we had to remember him as he was in his decline, when the enemy within his flesh had beaten him down, and wounded him sorely, and half-blinded his eyes to what he saw so clearly in his youth. But, thank God! we have not to estimate a true man by his worst but by his best. Inter his faults with his bones: crown his virtues with the pure gold of his work.

The fine climacteric of Carlyle's life was his election as Lord Rector of Edinburgh University, by an overwhelming vote of the students, who chose him over Disraeli. The address which he delivered in April, 1866, was the same in theme and purport as Sir James Barrie's famous discourse on *Courage*, delivered in the same place more than half a century later.

It was a day of sunlit power when the prophet, seventy-one years old, stood up before his young countrymen and gray-haired peers, to deliver his message from heaven. He spoke, writes one who was there, "slowly, connectedly, nobly," and his hearers listened "like children held by a tale of wonderland." His eyes, serene and kindly, flashed and throbbed with inner light as the words of inspiration fell from his lips:

"I believe you will find in all histories of nations, that [religion] has been at the origin and foundation of them all; and that no nation which did not contemplate this wonderful universe with

an awe-stricken and reverential belief that there was a great unknown, omnipotent, and all-wise and all-just Being, superintending all men in it, and all interests in it,—no nation ever came to very much, nor did any man either, who forgot that. . . .

"[Man] is born to expend every particle of strength that God Almighty has given him, in doing the work he finds he is fit for; to stand up to it to the last breath of life, and do his best. We are called upon to do that; and the reward we all get—which we are perfectly sure of, if we have merited it—is that we have got the work done, or at least that we have tried to do the work. For that is a blessing in itself; and I should say, there is not very much more reward than that going in this world."

III

FOUR NOTEWORTHY MODERN NOVELS

WITHOUT PREJUDICE

A PREJUDICE is an unfavorable judgment formed before a due consideration of the facts. A prepossession is a favorable judgment formed in the same way. It is the verbal particle *pre* in both words that marks the flaw, the weakness, the defect in the mental attitudes which they denote. Both of them are lacking in a firm foundation; they are in a certain sense hasty, although in effect they may have their roots in old and obstinate mental habits; at all events they may fairly be described (in good slang) as "previous,"—and here, you see, our luminous Latin particle *pre* comes into play again.

Both prejudices and prepossessions hinder sound criticism, which is nothing more or less than an honest and rational effort to arrive at a true understanding. But of the two, prejudices

are far the more harmful and hindering. In some cases they are absolutely poisonous. They not only prevent the formation of a fair judgment; they infect the blood of the would-be critic with toxic matter, charging his wit with malice, changing his unfavorable comment into impudent abuse, and making the man more or less like Thersites in *The Iliad*, a raucous reviler of all that he would not take the trouble to understand.

"Clear your mind of cant," said the wise Doctor Samuel Johnson, when he was seventy-five years old. It is not an easy thing to do; but I have tried to do it; and with the cant I have tried to get rid of the prejudices and prepossessions, which, like the maladies of children, afflict our youth and have a tendency to recur in age.

I have no prepossession for the old, if it is bad work; and no prejudice against the new, if it is good work. Of course a man must have cer-

tain standards of goodness and badness in work if he is going to form reasonable judgments at all. The only reason why I can not like some of the new books is because they are so unmistakably old, born old, old as Sodom and Gomorrah, old as the Greek sophists, old as that primal pessimist, the Ape, who always chatters, often misbehaves, and is usually sad or spiteful. But the new books which are free from these faults, and have virtues of their own, are a joy to my mind, all the more because they are new, because they belong to the very strange and interesting age in which you and I are living.

Of the four noteworthy modern novels considered in the following chapters, two were written in the nineteenth century and two in the twentieth. But all four are modern in spirit, fully aware of the strong currents of thought and feeling that are sweeping away so much antiquated rubbish, and at the same time threatening, if they rise in flood, to submerge so much

that is precious and unreplaceable in the life of man.

The change from Fielding and Smollett to Thackeray and Dickens was hardly greater than the change from them to Meredith and Hardy. Whether the subsequent transition to the fine type of fiction represented here by Willa Cather and Thornton Wilder was as great, is for the reader to judge.

One thing is quite clear in all four of the books which I now propose to consider and discuss. The most interesting side of life is its philosophic aspect,—not the how, but the why, —the question of ethics, of religion, if you choose to put it that way,—the problem of fate and free-will and responsibility. On that our modern inventions, railways, telephones, automobiles, aeroplanes, and radiophones, throw no new light. We must work it out, as of old.

FOUR NOTEWORTHY MODERN NOVELS

X

"THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL

A HISTORY OF A FATHER AND SON"

THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL

A HISTORY OF A FATHER AND SON

GEORGE MEREDITH, one of the greater English novelists, was born at Portsmouth, in 1828, the grandson of a picturesque tailor in that naval town. Melchizedeck Meredith was a dandy, a fox-hunter and a favorite with the ladies, widely known as "the great Mel." His extravagance brought the family fortune low. After various vicissitudes, and a bit of schooling in a Moravian seminary in Germany, the promising grandson George found himself, at eighteen years of age, an articled clerk in the office of a London solicitor. But this solicitor was fonder of letters than of the law, and so his young clerk was drawn into one of those ardent circles of commencing authors by whom amateur maga-

zines are supported. George Meredith made his literary début with a martial ballad entitled *Chillianwallah*, valiantly describing a small battle in India.

He was then twenty-one years old, and in the same year he was married to the oldest daughter of Thomas Love Peacock, a Tory squire and eccentric author. She was a handsome woman of high spirits and temper, the widow of a naval officer, and ten years older than Meredith. There are some curious stories about the intimate circumstances of this marriage, which it would be unprofitable and probably difficult to verify. All Meredith's letters relating to that period, except one, have been lost or suppressed. But whether or not he was married in haste, it is certain that he repented at leisure. The half-young pair collaborated on a cookery book and some poems, but not on the art of living together. Their adventure in matrimony was like a prolonged quarrel, with literary interludes. After some

years of it, the lady deserted him in 1858 and ran away with a painter, leaving her husband to take care of their only child, a boy about five years old, to whose nursing and education the shocked and distracted father henceforth devoted himself.

These domestic details would be of little interest were it not for the light they throw upon the quality of the man and the way in which his genius unfolded. First of all, they indicate that Meredith's satirical manner and first fantastic style of writing were directly influenced by his father-in-law, Squire Peacock. This whimsical man of talent lived at ease on his comfortable estate, enjoying nature, the classics, music, good food and wines, and writing at his leisure the queerest of novels, wherein all things earthly and heavenly were ridiculed or extolled in extravagant fashion. Read *Headlong Hall*, *Crotchet Castle*, and *Nightmare Abbey*, and you will see in these diversions of a talented radical

Tory many of the tricks and manners which characterize *The Shaving of Shagpat*, and *Farina*, the first prose romances of George Meridith. *Shagpat* is a brilliant complicated burlesque, a mixture of *The Arabian Nights* and one of Carlyle's *Tracts for the Times*. A man may well boast of having read it once. But if he reads it again, he has only himself to blame. *Farina* is equally whimsical, but weaker.

At the age of thirty, with only these two freakish romances to his score, disillusioned and deserted by his freakish wife, left alone to a wandering life with his rather difficult little boy, poor in purse and shaken in health, George Meredith suddenly produced, in 1859, one of the master-pieces of English fiction, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*.

How? By what magic? By the magic of genius. By the force of a sane and courageous manhood which would not let disaster drive it mad, nor allow the falsehood of one woman to

lead it into the misogynist's rabid contempt for all womankind. On the contrary, Meredith made his misfortune his good fortune. It seems as if the hostility of his poor ill-mated wife and the pure strong friendship of a high-minded girl, Janet Duff-Gordon, helped him to understand women, if not completely, at least better than most men. I think the heroines in Meredith's books are the best in English prose fiction, with the possible exception of two of George Eliot's.

But certainly another thing that helped him to overcome his initial disaster and to withstand the later trials of fortune, was his philosophy of life, built up within his experience and partly formulated, in his fiftieth year, in an essay called *The Comic Spirit.* A life without such a forming and formative philosophy is as dangerous as a voyage in an ill-conditioned and poorly officered ship, without balance or control.

The object of life, says Meredith, is education: purification of rebellious intemperate

youth, humiliation of self-satisfied dogmatic age. This is painful to the Ego,—a fiery ordeal. But we make it more painful by neglecting the aid of the Comic Spirit which hovers above our inconsistent civilization. It is not the spirit of mockery, nor of noisy laughter. It is the spirit which smiles and understands,—smiles because the Ego is so often absurd, understands because it has an irresistible sympathy with the schoolboy in mankind. Such is the serious-humorous philosophy which you may trace in all Meredith's more important novels; *Rhoda Fleming, Vittoria, The Egoist, Diana of the Crossways.* If you read with understanding, you must feel its half-conscious beginning in his first masterpiece, *Richard Feverel.*

The story opens with a father in precisely Meredith's situation. Deserted by his wife, who had eloped with a sort of poet, a household pet, Sir Austin Feverel devotes himself to the education of his only child, Richard. This boy he pur-

poses to develop into a model English gentleman, intelligent, fearless, frank, charming, generous, and thoroughly aware of his own high value to the world. The evolution of this paragon is to proceed by a stringent method of Sir Austin's own devising, which he proudly calls "The System," and in which he has an inventor's confidence in the god he has created.

Just here you may catch the elusive smile of the Comic Spirit, and his whispered comment on the folly of a father strong enough to invent such a System, imagining that his own son will be weak enough to submit to it.

But at first all goes well. Richard is a fine boy, brave, handsome, clever, devoted to his father, and easily convinced of his own central position in the universe. This comes out in his boyish friendships and fights, and especially in his first big scrape, the burning of some grain-ricks belonging to a surly farmer who had impudently given a well-deserved whipping to the

noble heir of Raynham Abbey, the partially finished product of the great System. But this juvenile experiment in arson is only the precursor of the great storm which is to shake the System to its base.

Richard arrives at that period of life which Sir Austin's book of omniscient axioms, *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, dubs "the Magnetic Age,"—a romantic Victorian periphrase for the more strictly physiological term which we use now-a-days. He begins to meditate on marriage, and dreams of his pretty, gentle cousin, Clare Doria Forey as a very proper mate. In the midst of this dream Nature takes a hand, and brings the young hero's boat, drifting down the river, to the Enchanted Island, where Ferdinand meets Miranda. Here she is:

"Above green-flashing plunges of a weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the reeds. Meadow-sweet hung from the banks thick with

weed and trailing bramble, and there also hung a daughter of earth. Her face was shaded by a broad straw hat with a flexible brim that left her lips and chin in the sun, and sometimes nodding, sent forth a light of promising eyes. Across her shoulders, and behind, flowed large loose curls, brown in shadow, almost golden where the ray touched them. She was simply dressed, befitting decency and the season. On a closer inspection you might see that her lips were stained. This blooming young person was regaling on dewberries. They grew between the bank and the water. . . .

"The little skylark went up above her, all song, to the smooth southern cloud lying along the blue: from a dewy copse dark over her nodding hat the blackbird fluted, calling to her with thrice mellow note: the kingfisher flashed emerald out of green osiers: a bow-winged heron travelled aloft, seeking solitude: a boat slipped toward her, containing a dreamy youth; and

still she plucked the fruit, and ate, and mused, as if no fairy prince were invading her territories, and as if she wished not for one, or knew not her wishes. Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weir-fall's thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting; a terrible attraction. The Magnetic Youth leaned round to note his proximity to the weir-piles, and beheld the sweet vision. Stiller and stiller grew nature, as at the meeting of two electric clouds. Her posture was so graceful, that though he was making straight for the weir, he dared not dip a scull. Just then one enticing dewberry caught her eyes. He was floating by unheeded, and saw that her hand stretched low, and could not gather what it sought. A stroke from his right brought him beside her. The damsel glanced up dismayed, and her whole shape trembled over the brink. Richard sprang from his

boat into the water. Pressing a hand beneath her foot, which she had thrust against the crumbling wet sides of the bank to save herself, he enabled her to recover her balance, and gain safe earth, whither he followed her."

The girl is Lucy Desborough, orphan daughter of a naval officer, poor, and a niece of that very farmer whose ricks the boy Richard had burned. Here is a pretty complication. Nature declares war against the System, which of course includes marriage to a high-born and well-to-do maiden as its proper crown for the heir of Raynham Abbey.

Meredith says somewhere that "the Love-season is the carnival of Egoism, and it brings the touchstone to our natures." Now here are at least four forces of love applying touchstones: Sir Austin's dominating love of his son; the son's admiring love of his father; Richard's appropriating love of Lucy; Lucy's deep romantic love of Richard. Through this four-sided strife

the major and minor persons of the story move in and out, through a series of "ordeals" in each of which everything seems to hang on the decision of a single point.

Will Richard give up his love under his father's pressure? When he has yielded, in an hour of physical and mental weakness, will he turn back to Lucy again? After he has married her, will he let himself be separated from her by the plot contrived for that purpose? Will he fall into the net of the temptress who is sent to beguile him into unfaithfulness? Will that unfaithfulness separate him from his true love forever? Will Richard's proud father ever be reconciled to his son's young wife? Will Richard himself, driven away by what he calls his conscience but what is really his pride, ever come back to beg her forgiveness? And when he comes will he stay, or will pride drive him out again? Here are some of the tests and turnings in this love-story,—beautiful, dramatic, entrancing as

love-stories rarely are,—a story which in its way is comparable to *Romeo and Juliet.*

It is a strange thing, and worthy the notice of the Comic Spirit, that when *Richard Feverel* was first published it was denounced in some quarters as an impure book. Sermons were preached against it. Corpulent and static reviewers accused the author of trifling with moral questions. Trifling! In God's name what is trifling? Is truth-telling ever trifling? The radiant virtues of Meredith's book are its penetration and fearless truthfulness, lit up by humor and made humane by deep sympathy.

The more closely one reads *Richard Feverel,* desiring to understand the book for what it really is, the clearer it becomes that Pride is the real villain of the story, the chief enemy of mankind.

"By that sin fell the angels."

By that sin Systems, which are not without certain good points, are inflated, puffed-up, filled

with the wind of self-importance, made pretentious and tyrannical. By that sin men are led to misunderstand and despise one another; to nourish that self-complacency which is the balm of life and the bane of progress; to scorn and ostracize those who do not agree with them on matters of creed, or dress, or diet; to set up their exceedingly fallible egos as infallible judges and directors, and their own small "Pilgrim's Scrip" as an inerrant scripture and an inflexible rule.

It was this devil Pride, mark you, that transformed Sir Austin Feverel's System from a not altogether unwise scheme of education into an intolerable *ancien régime* of paternal absolutism. It was this same devil that turned Richard's not unnatural declaration of independence into a wild revolt; and then made him false for a while to his own true love, who was far above him though he could not see it; and then drove him out into waste places seeking rest and finding none; and finally blinded him to the true and highest way of honor and peace for the soul of

an honest man. It was this same devil that persuaded the amiable Lady Blandish and the plump witty sybarite, Adrian Harley, to lend a hand in the nefarious plottings of Sir Austin to recapture and subjugate his darling unruly son. The only personage in the book whom this devil Pride does not mislead and mar is that plain, sunburned, straightforward fellow, Austin Wentworth, who humbly and finely plays the part of a restorer of disordered minds. He brings Lucy with her baby to Raynham Abbey, and Sir Austin Feverel promptly falls in love with them both. Then Wentworth sets out for Germany to find the distracted, ignorant Richard and lead him home.

At the news that he has a son, Richard's false pride melts; he turns toward Raynham Abbey and Lucy. But on the way he has a quarrel,—a just quarrel,—with a man who had traduced and tried to seduce Lucy. A challenge to a duel is given and accepted. Thus Richard comes back to his father's penitent and forgiving wel-

come, to his wife's tender and passionate embrace, to the first sight of his own child sleeping in its cradle. But he comes as a man self-chained by what he calls his honor, bound by pride to go to France to fight his duel. Will he go, or will he stay?

Now, you bland, cruel old devil, Pride, this is your last chance. Put forth all your force, use every argument of your subtlety to convince Richard that the code of honor calls him as a gentleman to the paced field of deadly combat. Make him forget that above his precious gentility, stands his plain manhood, to which a woman has trusted her glorious tender love for keeping, on which an innocent child depends for care and protection. Convince him that the punctilio of a person of rank and fashion takes precedence of these simple human things.

Remember, O devil Pride, this is the final Ordeal of Richard Feverel. Will you let him escape you now? Will you leave this shipwrecked,

wounded man, rescued from the treacherous fury of the waves, safe in the shelter of his father's house, happy in the desired haven of his wife's warm clinging arms? Or will you drag him out by the remorseless undertow of senseless social habits, drive him out by the buffeting winds of his own obstinate, reluctant, still unconquered Ego,—out, out and away, into the night, into the storm? What will you do with this man? Speak, devil, knowing that you have but a short time.

I will not mar the perfection of the two closing chapters of this book by a brief, dry *résumé*. Read them for yourself in their pulsating power of beauty. I do not think the great Comic Spirit can smile even faintly over a conclusion like this. It must weep a little instead. For there is no deeper tragedy on earth than when a mortal man mistakes himself for a god, and by that error kills the thing he loves.

FOUR NOTEWORTHY MODERN NOVELS

XI

"TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

A PURE WOMAN FAITHFULLY PRESENTED"

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

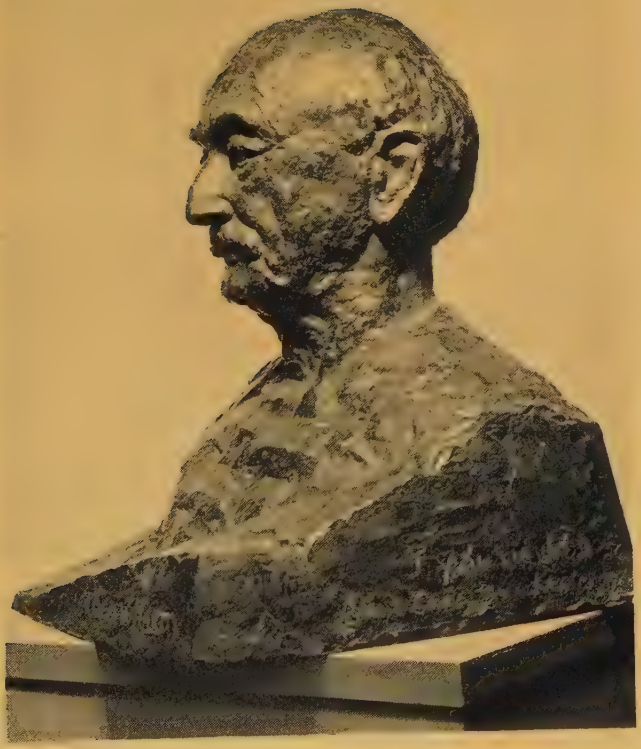
A PURE WOMAN FAITHFULLY PRESENTED

SUCH is the full title of Thomas Hardy's master-work in prose. Every word in this title has been weighed and chosen, carries a deep significance, reveals to the thinking reader something of the author's mind and heart and purpose. That is the way to write, if a man prefers excellence to popularity. Life is his subject, language his medium. He must care enough for his subject to make him respect his medium, and choose his words with a lover's eye to convey his real meaning, no more and no less. Thus Hardy wrote in all his novels, and that habit gave his style poignancy and power.

Our well-loved author, Sir James Barrie, has lately made some remarks on Hardy from which

I will quote. Barrie describes a meeting at a club where some of the men adjourned to the smoking-room to "talk for a breathless hour about *style*. Hardy's small contribution made no mark, but I thought," says Barrie, "how interesting it is that the only man among you who does not know all about style and a good deal more, is the only man among you who has *got* style." Barrie was too modest in leaving himself out. But his style and Hardy's are as unlike as the temperaments of the two men,—and that is as it should be.

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 at a little village in Dorset, one of the southern counties of England. The scenery of this county, the character and speech of its inhabitants, impressed themselves deeply upon his mind and are graphically reproduced in his books. He calls the region by its ancient name of Wessex, the kingdom of the West Saxons. You feel, in his Wessex novels, that he is tracing the deep



THOMAS HARDY.
From a bust by Serge Yourievitch.

roots of heredity and tradition and vital habit which underlie the character of the English rustic and make him seem, (at least to us Americans,) so antique, so quaint, so interestingly and obstinately set in his ways and opinions. It is against this fixed background, or rather in the midst of this rich, slow-moving atmosphere of inherited feelings and judgments, that Hardy's more adventurous personages play their rôles, —usually with tragic results.

Hardy was educated for the profession of architecture, more particularly of the ecclesiastical kind. But his natural bent was toward literature rather than toward building. He had learned to read Latin and Greek while he was a pupil in the architect's office, and had a strong leaning to philosophy. He began writing poetry when he was twenty and kept it up for nearly ten years. Then he abandoned it for prose, but returned to verse again when he was nearly sixty. His chief work of this kind is the

long, strange, difficult epic called *The Dynasts*, which was published in three volumes from 1903 to 1908. Undoubtedly it contains lines which will reward the diligent and indefatigable seeker for gold in the rock. But the labor is great. His verse is full of meaning, but often crabbed.

His prose, on the contrary, is generally clear, even when it runs deepest. He writes directly, forcibly, with a true sense of the values of words. Occasionally he lugs in an unfamiliar scientific term, like *static*, *thesmothete*, *zenithal*, *pink nebulosity*, and when he does that, the flow of his narrative is broken. For example, in *The Return of the Native*, he is describing a lovely woman amid the barren scenery of Egdon Heath: "Viewed sideways, the closing-line of her lips formed, with almost geometric precision, the curve so well known in the arts of design as the cima-recta, or ogee. The sight of such a flexible bend as that on grim Egdon was quite an apparition." Apparition? I should think so in-

deed! But it is not the curving line of the lips that startles us; it is the "cima-recta or ogee" that tempts us to exclaim, "What the devil are *you* doing here?"

But as a rule, Hardy's style is quite free from this kind of intrusive learnedness. Take, for example, his description of the Heath in the same book: "The place became full of a watchful intentness now; for when other things sank brooding to sleep, the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. . . . Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity. The qualifications which frequently invest the façade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the façade of a palace double its size, lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting." Then Hardy goes on to speculate on a probable

change in the kind of landscape which the ever gloomier modern man will love. "Spots like Iceland may become to him what the vineyards and myrtle-gardens of South Europe are to him now. . . . The new vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule." It is a conclusion in Hardy's sombre vein; but the picture is strongly painted.

His first novel, *Desperate Remedies*, appeared anonymously in 1871. It depends mainly on the plot for its interest. One critic has called it "a detective story of the most exciting kind." There are three mysteries in it, all tangled up together, and ending in two tragic deaths and one happy marriage. The motto is chosen from Scott: "Though a course of adventures which are only connected with each other by having happened to the same individual is what most frequently occurs in nature, yet the province of the romance-writer being artificial, there is more required from him than a mere compliance with the simplicity of reality."

Now what is that *something more*, and how does Hardy supply it? In this book it is certainly very little: a few scenes of natural description; a few pictures of rustic character; a few touches of sombre philosophy. Take the conversation between two farmers as they watch the coffin of the villain going by. "Now you'll hardly believe me, neighbor," says one, "but this little scene in front of us makes me feel less anxious about pushing on wi' that threshing and winnowing next week. Why should we not stand still, says I to myself, and fling a quiet eye upon the Whys and Wherefores, before the end o't all, and we go down into the mouldering place, and are forgotten?" "'Tis a feeling that will come," says the other, a hearty man of action, "but 'twont bear looking into. There's a back-'ard current in the world, and we must do our utmost to advance, in order just to bide where we be."

In the following novels it is still the plot, the

strange web of circumstance, the predestined accidental meeting, the fatal coincidence, the secret betrayed by a passing gust of wind, the mystery disclosed by a momentary gleam of light,—in short, the game which fate plays with us mortals, that holds the central place in each book. The plot is built up with care and design, as an architect would build.

His second novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, is not at all gloomy. He calls it in the sub-title, "A Rural Painting of the Dutch School." It is idyllic in spirit, charming in scenery and setting, faithful and minute in its humorous description of rustic life. Take this touch. John, hostler of the Old Fox in Weatherbury, remarks, in passing, to Michael the milkman, " 'More know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows.' 'More know Tom Fool—what rambling old canticle is it you say, Hostler?' enquired the milkman, lifting his ear. 'Let's have it again—a good saying

well spit out is a Christmas fire to my withered heart. More know Tom Fool—' 'Than Tom Fool knows,' said the hostler. 'Oh! That's the very feeling I've feeled over and over again, Hostler, though not in such gifted language. 'Tis a thought I've had in me more or less for years, and never could lick into shape!—Oh-ho-ho-ho! Splendid!' "

The third novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes,* is really a tragic story of cross-purposes and thwarting accidents treated almost with a touch of Meredith's "Comic Spirit."

But from this point onward the spirit of tragedy prevails more and more in the structure of Hardy's novels; the comedy is relegated to minor details. There are three of his books which are extravagant ironies: *The Hand of Ethelberta, Two on a Tower, A Laodicean.* But the others, *The Return of the Native, The Woodlanders, Far from the Madding Crowd,*

The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure,—the six books which are usually called his best,—are packed and loaded with grief.

Why is this? Some say that the sombre tone of his books, especially in the middle period, is a reflection of a certain unhappiness in his life. His first marriage, I have heard, was not altogether a congenial one. It cast a shadow of discontent upon his mind. After his second marriage, at the age of seventy-four, he was a much happier man and more inclined to accept the universe.

But even if this explanation is true, (and I do not profess to know whether it is or not,) it hardly seems adequate. There were many compensations in his life. Unlike Meredith he was successful as an author almost from the beginning. Popular applause came to him with his fourth book, and steadily increased. His income was more than sufficient. He had the

praise of the intelligent and the friendship of the wise. A reasonable man in such circumstances would hardly allow his whole work to be disordered and embittered by a grain of dust in the domestic machinery.

Moreover the gloom of Hardy's novels is singularly impersonal. It is not in any way an indictment of his own fortune, or a complaint of the way the world has treated him. It is rather a reflection on the general pitifulness and helplessness of the human lot as he sees it, a picture of the futility of human life at large, entangled in the web of unknown fates, and vainly struggling to escape.

Now to account for the manifest predominance of the darker colors in the work of a man of unquestionable genius, we must look for some theory of life, some *Welt-anschauung*, which gives a sombre tone to his imaginings. The philosophy in Hardy's mind is unmistakable. It is positivism, naturalism. According to

this view, unconscious Nature, working without design, produces man with his conscious passions, hopes, and aspirations, and thereafter thwarts him continually by adverse circumstance until he finds a temporary peace in submission or an eternal refuge in the dust from which he sprang. There is no progress of the race except into a sad recognition of the facts. There is no advance of the individual except into a state of mind which perceives the fundamental injustice of the universe, yet at the same time somehow miraculously maintains allegiance to "that purity of life upon which the well-being of society depends."

This last phrase is Hardy's own. It shows the noble inconsistency of his philosophy. For there is no reason in naturalism why "the well-being of society" should be preserved, and no connection, unless there be a moral law, between "purity of life" and social well-being. This in-

consistency is what gives human interest to Hardy's novels, makes us admire some of his characters and follow their stories with passionate absorbed sympathy. It is this also which gives a grave charm to his wonderful descriptions of nature and to his paintings of rural life, so full of rich and quiet humor and simple pathos. His Wessex peasants, farm-hands, shepherds, villagers, are certainly the best in English fiction. But his evident delight in drawing them does not change the sombre ground-tone of his underlying philosophy. For it is precisely in connection with such a group of laborers and villagers that he makes this significant remark: "It is among such communities as these that happiness will find her last refuge on earth, since it is among them that a perfect insight into the conditions of existence will be longest postponed."

A perfect insight! Mark the assumption

that this view of life is the only one that is really true and complete. But is it true, is it complete? Evidently not. Were it true, mankind would have found it out long ago, and committed suicide. Were it complete, there would be no room in the world for those examples of brave effort, and fine achievement, and simple happiness, and faithfulness even unto death, by which man's record upon earth is lifted above the things that perish.

Hardy's women as a rule are superior to his men,—at least we sympathize with them more,—perhaps because they have more to suffer. The exception to this is in *Jude the Obscure*, where the two women are the cruel fates and the man is the object of pity. (I can not like this book.)

In addition to their literary value, Hardy's novels have also a function of usefulness in the education of the mind. Their dark coloring, their insistence on the hard facts of life, is like

a bitter tonic to correct the cloying effect of over-indulgence in the sweet stuff of Pollyanna fiction. They are awakening, sobering, thought-arousing. They tend to "purify the mind by pity and fear."

As I go on to write of the novel in which this noble *katharsis* is most perfectly wrought, my memory recalls an incident of more than twenty years ago. A luncheon was given for me at a London club, to meet Thomas Hardy,—a little gray man, hawk-nosed, keen-eyed, gentle-mannered, with a kindly smile rarely lighting his furrowed tranquil face. Alone with him at last, I asked the indiscreet question, "Which of your books is your favorite?" Thinking a moment, he answered simply and frankly, "*Tess of the D'Urbervilles.*"

"That is because you love her best of all your characters, isn't it?" (You see, I was thinking of that passage in which he describes "the stopt-

diapason note of her voice when her heart was in her speech,"—a passage that suggests a personal memory of an unforgettable woman.)

"Yes," he said gravely, "I love her best of all."

"Why, then, did you kill her? Was there no other way to end the book?"

"There was no other way," he replied, still more gravely. "I did not kill her. It was fated."

Remembering this, I come now to speak of this novel not as the most characteristic work of Hardy's great art,—perhaps *The Woodlanders*, or *The Return of the Native* might claim that place—but with this remembrance in mind, I am sure that Hardy put into *Tess* his most intense personal feeling, and that the book marks the height of his tragic power. Usually he spent less than two years on a novel. But on this he spent four years, laboring *con amore*, as if he wished to present to the world an unan-

swerable challenge and a triumphant defense of his beloved,—which indeed he suggests in his sub-title, *A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented.*

The period of the story is left purposely in the mist. But from the reference to immigration to the "Empire of Brazil" we may place it in the 1880's. The scene is almost entirely in Hardy's Wessex. Never has the varied beauty of the vales in that rolling country been better painted. But over all that fresh and vivid landscape broods the ineluctable shadow of the human past.

Tess herself, the blossoming incarnation of lovely girlhood, is the daughter of John Durbeyfield, the village huckster. But this poor twist of a man is really the last off-shoot of a noble family, the D'Urbervilles, who came over with the Norman conqueror. Hearing of this, John drinks more and works less than ever, boasting in his cups that "There's not a man in Wessex that's got grander and nobler skelling-

tons in his family than I." But for Tess, in her poor peasant dress, working for her bread, there is only the mocking thought that had she been born three centuries earlier, she would be the Lady Teresa D'Urberville, clad in silk and velvet.

This innocent, unselfish girl, walking in beauty like the night, is pure as the hapless Desdemona. But by her beauty and her innocence she is made the victim, first of the cruelty in lust of a rich young barbarian, then of the narrowness in love of a priggish young intellectual, and finally of a chain of circumstances which drive her to penury and despair, and at last madden her into a momentary rage of murder at the very hour when her unknown deliverance draws near.

Through all the way, not only in her brief moments of happiness, but even more in the dark months of trial and desolation, she is lovely and innocent, and our hearts go out in her defence.

This was what Hardy intended, and in this I dare maintain him right. And in his indignation at the human blindnesses and prejudices and cruelties that strike her down and wound her unto death, he is right.

But is he right in making this the ground for an indictment of the universe and a mocking taunt at the idea of a Supreme Being who could preside over such a sorry scheme of things? I think not. It is just in this that he is most unkind to his beloved Tess. First he takes away from her that simple faith which might have sustained and saved her in her last trial. Then he lets her fall into blank darkness without hope of an after-light.

I will not spoil the story by condensing it. You must follow every turn of it to understand what it really is. As a vindication of Tess, it is sublime. As an indictment of God, it fails. But the tale itself is full of beauty and power, beyond words to praise.

At the very end Tess is granted a few fugitive days of ecstatic happiness. Then the pursuers catch up with her and carry her off to death behind the walls of Wintoncester jail. It is like a Greek tragedy. Hardy concludes it thus.

" 'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals, (in Æschylean phrase,) had ended his sport with Tess."

Ah no, great passionate defender of the "pure woman faithfully presented," your passion carries you beyond the bounds of your own reason, beyond even the stern philosophy of the Greek tragedians. In the *Oresteia*, as in *Les Misérables*, Nemesis is the instrument of an eternal righteousness.

Who killed Tess? Not God, certainly. Man killed her. The guilt of her death lies between Alec D'Urberville, the lustful libertine, and Angel Clare, the narrow-minded puritan agnostic. And beyond her death, waiting for her sweet

tormented soul, there is the Christ who pardoned Mary Magdalene.

Let us hope that Thomas Hardy knows this now. For his long last years were passed in Christian peace,

> "serene
> And lovely as a Lapland night."

His ashes are entombed in Westminster Abbey, among the great of England. His heart rests, by his own wish, in the village churchyard of "Mellstock," beside his father and mother.

FOUR NOTEWORTHY MODERN NOVELS

XII

"THE BRIDGE OF SAN LUIS REY"

THE BRIDGE OF SAN LUIS REY

HERE is a book that emerged in the autumn of the year 1927 with all the charm of a surprise. Even the herald trumpets of the publishers, enthusiastic as usual but not particularly informative, failed to prepare us for such a clear, brilliant, tranquil appearance in the literary firmament.

> "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken."

It is still probably too soon to predict its orbit, to measure its radiance, and to assign its rank in the starry order. Time, which may perhaps be nothing more than a relation of events, is certainly a necessary factor in the formation

of sound judgments. We can not tell definitely just where some things belong until some other things have happened. Revolutions of fashion in thought and language, *temblors* in popular idolatry, floods in current opinion, droughts and famines in what is called the public mind, must come and go before we can estimate the real vitality of a novel, its fitness and power to survive. I do not belong to the tribe of book-promoters who write prophecies of immortality at short notice. But without misgiving I call *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* a noteworthy modern novel because it has three qualities of excellence.

First, it has that closeness to nature and to human life in body and spirit, which makes a story real instead of realistic. Second, it has an original and sea-worthy plan of structure which gives unity to the varied material of the book. Third, it is written in an admirable English style, clear but not shallow, picturesque without affectation, forceful without explosion, and

moving steadily to express the author's thought and feeling through a nice choice of words. There is no trace of anxiety or timidity in Mr. Wilder's diction. On the contrary, he moves with the natural and fearless step of a good walker. He chooses his path and his foothold, not because he is afraid of the grammarians and dictionary-men, but because he wishes to get forward with what he is trying to convey to his readers. Carefulness, nicety in diction, is a virtue in writers. But I think meticulosity is a cramping vice.

I am sorry that, in this case, I can not follow my usual habit of preceding the criticism of a book with an attempt to understand and sketch the personality of the author. The fact is that I have never seen Mr. Wilder, and know nothing of him beyond the meager data given on the paper jacket of his famous book. Here we are told that he was born at Madison, Wisconsin, in 1897; passed his boyhood in China, where his father was Consul General; graduated from

Yale University in 1920; and after that spent two years at the American Academy in Rome. Then he entered the Graduate College at Princeton, became a teacher in Lawrenceville School, and produced his master-piece.

In all this, if it be correct, I find nothing of special significance, except perhaps the boyhood in China. This may have prepared him unconsciously to carry out Dr. Samuel Johnson's maxim and

"Survey mankind, from China to Peru."

That object of study, experience has taught me, has the same essential qualities in Asia and in South America. The variations of type are infinite and unpredictable. The stuff, male and female, changes little except in external matters like pigtails and bobbed hair, cramped feet and high heels, long trousers, flowing robes, and short skirts. These are negligible things and have no more to do with the gist of a story than

the sedan-chairs or jinrikishas, automobiles or air-planes, in which the characters travel around, remaining very much the same at the end of a journey as they were at the beginning. Pray do not make the stupid mistake of supposing that the modernity of a story depends upon the kind of machinery that the people use in it. I think *The Æneid* will always be a modern epic, in spite of the invention of gunpowder, the printing-press, and trial by jury.

And yet one may well concede to the novelist the wisdom of choosing a picturesque background, a vivid *mise en scène* like Peru in the eighteenth century. There an ancient and moribund civilization lived cheek by jowl with an obstinate primitive culture which it had conquered but could never quite obliterate, proud Spaniard ruling but never really overcoming equally proud Indian. There, despite the presence of a city like Lima which looks almost more Spanish than anything in Spain, nature still

keeps her pristine glory of wild mountain, savage glen, tangled forest, and untamed river roaring down the rocks. This wonderful background, Mr. Wilder feels and incorporates in his book, though he has never been bodily in Peru. In imagination he has been there and has breathed its vital air. Perhaps this has something to do with the immense superiority of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* to his first book, *The Cabala.*

I have read that youthful volume with care and found in it little more than a terribly clever complication of trifles. It is what is called a "society novel," with the scene laid in modern Rome, among a set of incredible people, who are bound together by a mysterious purpose to re-establish the Divine Right of Kings, and by an unjustified sense of their own superiority to the rest of the world. One of the book-advertisers announced the volume as "a brilliant novel with the cool, sparkling quality of a champagne cock-

tail,"—an announcement which shows an amazing ignorance of the real qualities of that overpraised beverage and a total incapacity of judging the merits of a book. Smart the story is,—too smart to be really interesting. It is as superficial as a cosmetic, as sophisticated as a middle-aged flapper, and as far from literature as jazz is from music. Even the style of the book seems to be affected by the stuff in which the author works. For example, he spells acoustics with three c's; says that "at luncheon *one* barely looked at *one another*," (which of course is impossible); speaks of a "considerable impact"; and describes the portrait of a man as having "grinning pugnacious eyes." Now to grin means to show the teeth, and by no stretch of physiological imagination can the eyes be made to do that.

The Cabala is a clever, light-waisted little book, which might be liked, to use Lincoln's phrase, by those who like that sort of thing. But

The Bridge of San Luis Rey belongs to an entirely different class. It arrests attention. It leaves a deep and clear impression on the mind. How shall we account for this extraordinary advance of a writer's power in a year's time?

Frankly, I do not know, and I doubt whether anybody knows. In a way, it is like the leap in George Meredith's art from *The Shaving of Shagpat* and *Farina,* to *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.* Please understand: I do not mean to put Thornton Wilder's noteworthy book on a level with Meredith's master-piece. That would be extravagant praise. But I mean to say that there is a vital difference between Mr. Wilder's first novel and his second, which is interesting and in a way amazing.

Of course, we should like to be able to say that the atmosphere of the Graduate College at Princeton had something to do with that remarkable efflorescence. But who can tell? Only the author himself, if he knows, and if he chooses to tell.

All academic theories and prescriptions for the production of literature, are as vain and futile as the proposal to create a finer race of men by a rationed diet of proteins, vitamins, calories, and roughage. There is not much in it. Many of its ardent advocates are themselves dyspeptic and die before they have reached three score years and ten. The best way to improve a manly stock is to eat what you like if it agrees with you, to spend as much time as possible in the open air, to have a sport that amuses you and a work that engages your best powers, to love one woman and to make as many friends as you can without capitulation, and finally to believe that Some One wiser and better than you is governing the universe, and that all that is required of you is to do your own particular duty from day to day in justice, and mercy, and humility.

Equally plain and simple is the way to authorship, for those who have the needful gifts. Read what you like if it agrees with you and

makes you wiser, happier, and stronger. Have one central study on which you can focus your mind, and plenty of side-line studies which will keep you in touch with what other men are studying. Don't imprison yourself in any literary sect, or clan, or mutual admiration society, but keep an open-air intelligence and if possible get a practical job outside of your writing. Thus you can earn your daily bread without doing "pot-boilers." Then when you get hold of something that is worth writing about,—something that you intensely desire to have other people see and feel and understand,—produce it with all your heart and mind and strength. Spare no pains or labor to make the form of it as perfect as you can. Then, but not till then, let it go out like a boat on the stream; and if the world accepts it, lucky you! Waste no time in patting yourself on the back, but slowly and steadily begin to get ready for your next launching.

THORNTON WILDER.
From a photograph by Doris Ulmann.

Having freed my mind of these few plain maxims, (which are not found in any text-book of rhetoric,) I now ask you to come with me to *The Bridge of San Luis Rey.* Let Mr. Wilder describe the bridge, for he makes the picture in the fewest and the best words.

"This bridge was on the high-road between Lima and Cuzco and hundreds of persons passed over it every day. It had been woven of osier by the Incas more than a century before and visitors to the city were always led out to see it. It was a mere ladder of thin slats swung out over the gorge, with handrails of dried vine. Horses and coaches and chairs had to go down hundreds of feet below and pass over the narrow torrent on rafts, but no one, not even the Viceroy, not even the Archbishop of Lima, had descended with the baggage rather than cross by the famous bridge of San Luis Rey. St. Louis of France himself protected it, by his name and by the little mud church on the further side. The

bridge seemed to be among the things that last forever; it was unthinkable that it should break."

Here you have the perfect frontispiece of the book, done with an etcher's art, just enough and no more, no blurred lines, no purple patches of misplaced eloquence. With a turn of the hand so easy that its trained skillfulness is hidden, the author puts his drama on his chosen stage, the Peru of 1714. All the necessary connections are made: with the strange history of the Incas and the Conquistadors; with viceregal pomp and ecclesiastical power; with the common people going their lawful errands from day to day, and always choosing the perilous passage of the bridge protected by a saint's name rather than the tiresome climb down into the gulch and up again on the other side; and, best of all, the connection is made with nature, the snowy Andes, the rich half-tropical forest, the wild canyon,

the rushing torrent below, and the beautiful frail bridge of wood suspended above the gulf by osiers whose strength had been invisibly decaying for more than a hundred years.

A young red-haired Franciscan monk, returning from a mission-journey among the Indians, halts a moment on the hillside to wipe the sweat from his forehead and rest his soul with the view. It is still as only a southern noon can be. Five tiny human figures are slowly, tranquilly crossing the gulf on the hanging wooden pathway. Suddenly there comes a twanging sound on the air. The bridge parts. The five little travellers, like puppets with waving arms and legs, are dropped silently into death.

Here is the catastrophe, in the first act of the play. Is not this bad art? Anti-climax? What is left for the author to tell, after this tragic mischance has swept the scene?

Everything is left. First of all, there is the vi-

tal question whether it was indeed a "*mischance*," or something very different. This is the question which the little red-haired Brother Juniper, a devout, curious, obstinate, fearless soul, takes up and determines to answer through a careful study of these five human lives which have so tragically dropped out of the visible world. He believes that there is a plan in the universe and a pattern in every human life. This he resolves to prove scientifically by a laboratory investigation of the stories of these five persons who fell with the bridge. It is a heroic, perhaps an impossible, task. A scientific answer to the question may be beyond man's reach. But the mere asking of it proves man's quality and his position in the cosmos. Man is the animal who wants to know.

The posing of a philosophical or moral problem is really the most interesting thing in the world. What does human life mean? Is it only a process of chemical action and reaction? Or

is it the training and testing of persons? What does this life or that life embody and signify? Is it only

> "a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing"?

Or is it worth considering, pondering, understanding? Has it anything to tell us that is of vital importance?

The entrance of a question like this into a novel does not spoil it, does not necessarily transform it into an arid tractate or a dogmatic treatise. Provided the novelist remembers that his task is to stick close to people, facts, events, motives, and make them live in our imagination, the presence of a serious meaning, suggested and sought for in his story, adds immensely to its interest. That is why *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* are great books. That is why *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is immeasurably superior to the ruck of decidu-

ous best-sellers like *Sophisticated Susie's Methods with Her Husbands*, or *How Herbert Hemingoozle Learned to Distinguish Cocktails in Paris.*

Thornton Wilder makes his red-haired Fra Juniper, with his world-challenging question, real enough to make us think, but not so prominent as to obscure our vision. For years the little friar labors on the collection of the data about the five persons who fell with the bridge. He produces a huge tome, which is condemned by the Inquisition at Lima as heretical and burned at the stake together with its obstinately devout and smiling author. But a secret copy of the volume is preserved in the University Library of San Marco. From this record, real or imaginary, Mr. Wilder professes to draw most of the material for the three short stories which he has woven into the tapestry of his novel. It is an excellent device, reminding us at once of Robert Browning's "square old yellow Book," out of which he evoked his poem of *The Ring*

and the Book. Artifice? Yes, surely. But remember, great fiction is not a growth of nature; it is a work of art.

Of the three stories which the novel tells, not separately but interlaced by more than accident, I beg you to observe that they are all love-stories. They do not deal with that sentimental, romantic, illusory type of love which used to be the stock-in-trade of the Victorian novelists who ended their books with "and-so-they-were-married," and which the George-the-Fifthian novelists now conclude with "and-so-they-were-divorced." Of this amatory type Mr. Wilder's book has hardly a trace. The liaison of the actress Camila Perichole with the fat Viceroy Don Andrés was a physical affair based upon pecuniary considerations. But it remains in the background, and it disappears from the story like a rather shady marginal note written in vanishing ink. The other tales are different, more interesting, more important.

First comes the story of the Marquesa de

Montemayor, a very rich, ugly old woman, addicted to solitary drinking, who has a beautiful, cold, only daughter, married and living in Spain. On this absent child the mother lavishes her wealth and her intense affection. To her she writes letters of amazing wit, and charm, and tenderness, which are not only literary jewels, like the famous letters of Madame de Sévigné, but wonderful expressions of mother-love. The daughter's answers are dull, chilly, negligible.

The Marquesa sinks lower and lower in her personal habits, her eccentricities, her morbid distrust of all the world except her ungrateful daughter. But she manages to keep up her brilliant letters. She has adopted as a companion an orphan girl from the Convent of Santa Maria Rosa de las Rosas. Pepita is a simple, honest, devoted maid, of unusual intelligence and ability, whom the Abbess Maria del Pilar wishes to train, by experience in the world, for the management of the convent. She has

the experience and comes through it bravely. The Marquesa, informed by letter that her daughter in Spain expects to have a child, goes to pray for her at a remote shrine in the mountains, and takes Pepita with her. In that lofty solitude, the complex old woman and the simple girl come closer to each other, reading each in the other's heart a secret of that great love which is unselfish and loyal. They set out together to return to Lima, by way of the bridge, which falls with them. So they find the secret.

The second tale has to do with the twin-brothers, Manuel and Esteban, foundlings adopted by the Abbess of Santa Maria Rosa. They grow up into strong, sombre, silent young men, intelligent, clever with their hands, industrious, but apparently without ambition. They are bound together by a deep passionate brotherhood which creates a secret language for itself. Wilder says: "*Love* is inadequate to describe the tacit almost ashamed oneness of these

brothers. . . . There existed a need of each other so terrible that it produced miracles. . . . Telepathy was a common occurrence in their lives, and when one returned home the other was always aware of it when his brother was still several streets away."

Manuel falls into a romantic passion for the beautiful actress Camila. For a little while this threatens to divide him from Esteban, but when Manuel realizes this he renounces his romance, blows it out like a candle. Then he injures his knee and the wound becomes infected. Esteban nurses him through days and nights of anguish and delirium. But Manuel dies, and Esteban wanders out alone into the desert of the world. At last, in Cuzco he meets the brave explorer Captain Alvarado and engages to go with him on his next voyage of discovery. In the night Esteban wavers, is tempted to commit suicide, fights against the awful loneliness of his brother-love. In the morning he sets out with Alvarado

to take ship at Lima. But Esteban is booked for another voyage. He steps onto the bridge, while the Captain climbs down into the gulch looking after the luggage. So the bridge spares Esteban the trouble and shame of killing himself.

The third story is about Camila Perichole and her old adoring teacher, Uncle Pio, and the little boy who was the child of Camila and Don Andrés. It is a strange tale, with many breaks and omissions and unsolved mysteries. But the one thread that runs through it all unbroken is the strong and tender tie between the grotesque witty old man and the beautiful gifted actress. Rumor said that she was his daughter. I think not. But undoubtedly she was his creation. He took the awkward, ignorant slip of a girl and trained her, taught her all she knew, poured poetry and music into her, disciplined her in the art of acting, and transformed the ugly duckling into a queen-swan of the stage.

The story is something like that which Thack-

eray tells of the Fotheringay and her old teacher, the fiddler Bows, in the opening chapters of *Pendennis*. But Mr. Wilder's story is better told,—more tersely, picturesquely, convincingly. Perhaps that is because Camila is more of a woman than the Fotheringay. She is not ungrateful and cold to her maker. "They loved each other," writes Mr. Wilder, "deeply but without passion." That is why, despite her tantrums, she trusts him and turns to him in trouble. When her beauty has been marred by small-pox and she has left the stage to live in rather solitary grandeur at her villa in the mountain-country, it is to Uncle Pio that she entrusts her frail eldest child, Don Jaime, to begin his education in Lima. The old worldling and the delicate boy go down the hill together in a cart. They step out on the bridge, no doubt hand-in-hand. Their education in a new school begins.

Now all the five tiny figures that Brother Juniper saw dropped into death when the bridge broke have been accounted for, made alive in our

imagination, revealed by their love-stories. Is the book ended? Not yet. Come back for a moment to the quiet convent of Santa Maria Rosa, (whither the selfish daughter of the old Marquesa has come perhaps for a kind of penance, and the broken Camila for refuge), and listen to the tranquil, faithful Mother Abbess telling what she thinks about the strange business of living.

"Even now," she thought, "almost no one remembers Esteban and Pepita, but myself. Camila alone remembers Uncle Pio and her son; this woman, her mother. But soon we shall all die and the memory of those five will have left the earth, and we ourselves shall be loved for a while and forgotten. But the love will have been enough; all those impulses of love return to the love that made them. Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning."

Is not the book which brings us this meaning

so clearly, so strongly, so beautifully, a great novel? I think so. Will it survive amid the throng of larger, more pretentious craft which crowd the waterways of literary commerce? I do not know, but I hope it will, and I wish good luck to the author's next launching.

FOUR NOTEWORTHY MODERN NOVELS

XIII

"DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP"

DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP

IT seems very likely, perhaps inevitable, that this essay in understanding will close with some kind of a sermon, or at least a sermocination. But if you have patience you may stay through without alarm. There will be no collection. You will not be asked to give anything, except a little serious attention to a subject which has a strong human appeal and a lively modern interest; namely: Religion as Adventure. Forty years ago I preached on this theme, using the text, "And he went forth not knowing whither he went." Time and again I have come back to the subject. Believing has always been a risk; you can't tell where it will lead you. But it is far less risky than not believing, because in spite

of doubts and dangers it makes life worth living.

The lives of great missionaries like St. Francis Xavier, Livingstone of Africa, Morrison of China, Carey of India, Paton of the New Hebrides, Underwood of Korea, Grenfell of the Labrador, and hundreds of others, prove and illustrate this. The missionary field is the great unexplored region of romance.

Religion as adventure: this is the vital theme of Miss Willa Cather's book. But, mark you, being an artist she does not set it forth as an abstract proposition, or support it by arguments logical or theological. She does not indulge in those protervities of disputation, orthodox or heretical, which overload and sink so many of our modern novels. She embodies the spirit of devout adventure in a very real man,—or rather in two men, strangely unlike each other, yet inseparably united,—and sends them out on their Quest, along picturesque and perilous trails, among all sorts and conditions of men, through

all kinds of hardships and trials, never dull, never complaining, never despairing, but gladly carrying on, until at last,—

> "Home is the sailor, home from sea,
> And the hunter home from the hill."

"Well," says one of the young Sophisticates, "what is there original or extraordinary about that? Everybody has to die, some time, and death is the same dreary thing whether it comes to a Heliogabalus, a Casanova, or a St. Francis of Assisi."

But is it really the same, my dismal young exotic? I think not. Have you noted how Miss Cather, with the sure hand of genius, has marked the difference in a single word of her title? It is not "Death comes *to* the Archbishop," but "Death comes *for* the Archbishop,"—as if a messenger were sent to recall and reward a faithful soldier of the King.

The mere cessation of the beating heart in a

human body is little more than an animal episode in biological history. It is such a common thing that it is hardly worth writing about, though, or perhaps because, we all have to endure it. What gives it significance and value is the life that goes before. The masters of English prose fiction and drama have understood this. Compare, for example, the dingy fading out of the fat nabob Jos Sedley, in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, with the soldierly end of old Colonel Newcome when he hears the last roll-call and raises himself in bed to answer *Adsum*,—here!

Miss Cather's book is written in this spirit. Hence comes its power, penetrating and vivifying her art. Of what use is it for a writer to know all about the laws of construction, the rules of grammar, the proprieties of style, unless that writer can carry them along as a well-built ship sails with cargo and passengers to its desired haven? This is what Miss Cather has done.

There is another great romance which has a

churchman at the heart of it. In Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Bishop Myriel, known to his people as Monseigneur Bienvenu, "My Lord Welcome," is the central shining figure.

I do not belong to that academic group who insist that popularity means inferiority. Neither do I belong to that commercial group who maintain that popularity means superiority. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* has been a popular book, a "best-seller." But that makes no difference, one way or the other. What I want to do is to understand what the book really is, and why it deserves a high rank among modern novels.

But is it really a novel after all? Is it not rather a chronicle, a biography, a bit of ecclesiastical history? Miss Cather frankly tells me that she has drawn the outline of her book from the well-known record of Father Lamy, the first bishop of New Mexico; but she says, "Many of the incidents are wholly imaginary, yet they are

all in the spirit of the two principal characters, I think, and a great many of the incidents are narrated pretty much as they occurred; I have received a number of letters from very old priests who worked under these two missionaries, and they generously insist that their memory of them is exactly identical with my conception of them."

With what truthfulness and modesty does this fine artist describe her relation to her work! She has kept her eye on the facts and her imagination beyond them. She has painted a recognizable portrait. But more than that, she has made a noble picture. She has done this by omission and addition, but most of all by quiet sympathetic interpretation, so that her two heroes are revealed to us, body and spirit, as they lived and moved and had their being in their bold undertaking of faith.

This is the law of prose fiction as Stevenson puts it somewhere: "What you can not vivify,

you should omit." I would add to this maxim two others: *Understand your man before you try to describe him;* and, *Write no story which has not in it some one whom you can love.*

Now it is this *plus* and *minus* of creative art which lifts Miss Cather's book out of the rather arid and dusty region of ecclesiastical chronicles, and makes it a true novel. The *minus* of trivial and insignificant details, supposed to be realistic, but effectively so unreal that in life we hardly notice them and in a book they tire us: the *plus* of color and contrast and natural scenery and social background by which the main figures are enhanced and made to live in our imagination so vividly that we can think and feel with them and almost hear them speak. That is the highest function of the novel: to enlarge life for us by bringing us acquainted with men and women worthy to be loved.

The book opens with a prologue which is quite unlike anything else in the volume.

"One summer evening in the year 1848, three Cardinals and a missionary Bishop from America were dining together in the garden of a villa in the Sabine hills, overlooking Rome. The villa was famous for the fine view from its terrace. The hidden garden in which the four men sat at table lay some twenty feet below the south end of this terrace, and was a mere shelf of rock, overhanging a steep declivity planted with vineyards. A flight of stone steps connected it with the promenade above. The table stood in a sanded square, among potted orange and oleander trees, shaded by spreading ilex oaks that grew out of the rocks overhead. Beyond the balustrade was the drop into the air, and far below the landscape stretched soft and undulating; there was nothing to arrest the eye until it reached Rome itself.

"It was early when the Spanish Cardinal and his guests sat down to dinner. The sun was still good for an hour of supreme splendour, and across the shining folds of country the low pro-

file of the city barely fretted the sky-line—indistinct except for the dome of St. Peter's, bluish gray like the flattened top of a great balloon, just a flash of copper light on its soft metallic surface. The Cardinal had an eccentric preference for beginning his dinner at this time in the late afternoon, when the vehemence of the sun suggested motion. The light was full of action and had a peculiar quality of climax—of splendid finish. It was both intense and soft, with a ruddiness as of much-multiplied candlelight, an aura of red in its flames. It bored into the ilex trees, illuminating their mahogany trunks and blurring their dark foliage; it warmed the bright green of the orange trees and the rose of the oleander blooms to gold; sent congested spiral patterns quivering over the damask and plate and crystal. The churchmen kept their rectangular clerical caps on their heads to protect them from the sun. The three Cardinals wore black cassocks with crimson pipings and

crimson buttons, the Bishop a long black coat over his violet vest."

Why this carefully painted scene of extreme refinement, of what one might almost call ecclesiastical luxury, at the beginning of a book which is full of the rough stuff of frontier life in a new era? In order that we may understand the antiquity, the intelligence, the many-sided culture, the material and mental richness of that vast organization which sends out and supports missionaries in the rude parts of the world.

A religion is like other living creatures in the crowded sea of life. For protection and self-preservation it must secrete a shell, an organization. Then the shell begins to cramp and strangle the living creature. Its life, its growth, its future depend upon the potent presence of a vital spirit which will make a new shell, not altogether unlike the old one, but larger, roomier, better adapted to new conditions in the world. Organization means either ossification or prog-

ress. No church can stay alive unless it has room within it both for conservatives and for liberals.

The three cardinals in the Roman villa, a Frenchman, an Italian, and a Spaniard, are accomplished men of the world, and they know that their guest, the sunburned, plain-spoken missionary, Father Ferrand, from the shores of Lake Ontario, is the very man to advise them in the choice of a Vicar Apostolic for the diocese of New Mexico which has just been taken into the domain of the United States. He tells them that it must be a young man, vigorous, "full of zeal, and above all, intelligent. He will have to deal with savagery and ignorance, with dissolute priests and political intrigue. He must be a man to whom order is necessary—as dear as life."

The Spanish cardinal slyly suggests that Father Ferrand already has a candidate in mind. He acknowledges it and briefly tells who the man is, "a parish priest, on the shores of Lake On-

tario, in my own diocese. I have watched his work for nine years. He is but thirty-five now."

The cardinals look at one another, smiling, and agree that they will commend this young man to the Provincial Council. That practically settles it. As they separate for the night, the Spaniard says a word in the ear of the old missionary:

"You are *distrait*, Father Ferrand. Are you wishing to unmake your new bishop already? It is too late. Jean Marie Latour—am I right?"

So the prologue ends, and the bio-novel begins.

* * *

There were no railways into New Mexico in those days. Father Latour, with his boyhood friend Father Vaillant, whom he has chosen as his comrade in the great adventure, must get from St. Louis to Santa Fé as best he can: by boat, which is ship-wrecked; by wagon, which upsets and lames him; by pack-train, which wears

him to the bone. After nearly a year of arduous travel he reaches his diocese only to find it in rebellion against him. The Mexican priests of Santa Fé, sunk in their old ways, (which were not very nice ways), refused to recognize a Vicar Apostolic. They knew nothing about him. Where were his papers? What right had he to try to reform Santa Fé?

Well, the parchments with the Papal seal and all that, had been sent to the old Bishop of Durango in Mexico, to which country Santa Fé had formerly belonged. That obese and indolent churchman had never acknowledged receipt of the documents, much less forwarded them. There was only one thing for our gentleman adventurer to do: saddle up and ride across three thousand miles of mountains and deserts to get his letters missive.

Here, then, we find him, lost on this long trail; and here we get the first description of his looks, through which his character shines. He

is astray and athirst in a fantastic wilderness of little red sand-hills and juniper trees.

"When he opened his eyes again, his glance immediately fell upon one juniper which differed in shape from the others. It was not a thick-growing cone, but a naked, twisted trunk, perhaps ten feet high, and at the top it parted into two lateral, flat-lying branches, with a little crest of green in the centre, just above the cleavage. Living vegetation could not present more faithfully the form of the Cross.

"The traveller dismounted, drew from his pocket a much worn book, and baring his head, knelt at the foot of the cruciform tree.

"Under his buckskin riding-coat he wore a black vest and the cravat and collar of a churchman. A young priest, at his devotions; and a priest in a thousand, one knew at a glance. His bowed head was not that of an ordinary man,—it was built for the seat of a fine intelligence. His brow was open, generous, reflective, his fea-

tures handsome and somewhat severe. There was a singular elegance about the hands below the fringed cuffs of the buckskin jacket. Everything showed him to be a man of gentle birth—brave, sensitive, courteous. His manners, even when he was alone in the desert, were distinguished. He had a kind of courtesy toward himself, toward his beasts, toward the juniper tree before which he knelt, and the God whom he was addressing.

"His devotions lasted perhaps half an hour, and when he rose he looked refreshed. He began talking to his mare in halting Spanish, asking whether she agreed with him that it would be better to push on, weary as she was, in hope of finding the trail. He had no water left in his canteen, and the horses had had none since yesterday morning. They had made a dry camp in these hills last night. The animals were almost at the end of their endurance, but they would not recuperate until they got water, and it

seemed best to spend their last strength in searching for it."

(I rode once in the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri, thirty-six hours without water. It was only a small experience, but it taught me, beyond forgetting, what the torture of thirst means,—perhaps the sharpest and most crazing agony that mortal flesh can endure.)

When Latour has got his letter missive from the somnolent Bishop of Durango, he rides back to Santa Fé, and finds that the situation there has wonderfully changed through the endearing activity of his chosen comrade, Father Joseph Vaillant. This little man was the exact contrast and counterpart of his beloved chief. Intensely practical and terribly superstitious, a gifted cook and a superb woodsman, a Frenchman Canadianized, ugly, bow-legged and wrinkled, yet indomitably young, he was above all else "a good mixer," as we say in our indispensable modern slang. "There was certainly nothing in his outer

WILLA CATHER.

case to suggest the fierceness and fortitude and fire of the man, and yet even the thick-blooded Mexican half-breeds knew his quality at once. If the Bishop returned to find Santa Fé friendly to him, it was because everybody believed in Father Vaillant,—homely, real, persistent, with the driving power of a dozen men in his poorly built body."

Thus you have the twin heroes of this bio-novel set before you, and you may follow their fortunes through light and darkness, through gladness and grief, through failure and success, in a book which the genius of the author has made the very human record of a divine adventure.

What was it that bound Jean Latour and Joseph Vaillant together? It was the resolve to do what they could to promote in New Mexico that Kingdom of Heaven which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

* * *

If you think this book is a piece of ecclesiastical propaganda, you will be very much disappointed in it. Here are all kinds of priests, good, bad, and indifferent, and all drawn to the life with a graphic and sure hand. Here is Padre Martinez, the gross, domineering sensualist, training one of his illegitimate sons for the same kind of priesthood. Here is old Padre Lucero, the miser of Arroyo Hondo, lusting for gold as Martinez lusted for women, and dying above his buried hoard in a convulsion of hatred and scorn for his ally and rival, old Martinez, who had already gone to his reckoning. Here is the aged, half-blind Padre Jesus of Isleta, a childish saint, ministering faithfully to the Indians of his parish and cultivating his garden of cactus plants, filled with cages of tame parrots. "There was a quality of golden goodness about him. His right eye was overgrown by a cataract, and he kept his head tilted as if he were trying to see around it. All his movements were to the left, as

if he were reaching or walking about some obstacle in his path."

Here are other figures, more secular, detached from the background of the church, mere men and women going their ways in virtue or in vice, and sometimes changing from one way to the other, but not often, for the set of a human character is either up or down by the power of the will which chooses good or evil.

Here is Kit Carson, the famous hunter and scout, with his buckskin clothes and his heart of gold. Here is Buck Scales, the degenerate, secret killer, from whose bloody house Fathers Latour and Vaillant barely escape. Here is Magdalena, his slave-wife, who warns the fathers to flee, at the risk of her own life, and afterward comes, by their help, into peace and quiet happiness. Here is a throng of persons, all different, all human, working out the problem of life in this half-tamed new world.

Among them all our two missionaries move

undismayed on their high adventure, tolerant, fearless, friendly, trying to persuade men and women to find their salvation in Christ. There is nothing ascetic or narrow about this pair of men. They accept St. Paul's view of life, that "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." For good meat and drink they are grateful, eating and drinking what is set before them, "asking no question for conscience' sake." They are seeking a better country, that is, a heavenly; but they do not think that their chance of getting there will be improved by making this earthly pilgrimage as miserable as possible for themselves and for their fellowmen.

There is no other plot than this in the book: plenty of incidents, tragic and comic; plenty of natural scenery and varied human interest; but the one thread that binds it all together is the indomitable purpose of these two men to put their faith to the test and make it count for something real in the world.

It is this, nothing but this, that parts the two comrades, near the end of their adventure, sending Joseph to his missionary work in the new gold-fields of Colorado, while Jean remains alone in Santa Fé. His great cathedral is built; his diocese is peaceful and prosperous; his probation is past, his task done. There death comes for him, —no unwelcome messenger, after so many perils, toils, and conflicts. His old brother-in-arms, Joseph, has already gone before him on the last long journey. There is nothing more to be dared, nothing more to be achieved. So the Archbishop lies on his narrow bed, day-dreaming of a green field in his native land, and of the two young men who found brotherhood there, and made adventure together,—until at last he falls asleep, to wake elsewhere.

After all, what need is there of a sermon after such a story? Actions speak not only louder, but often clearer, than words. Define less and do more. Religion is adventure, not in theory,

but in practice. What we need now is not a new set of Ten Commandments from a professor of sociology, but a truer understanding of the old ones and a stronger will to keep them. What the modern age lacks is not a new concept of God scientifically defined, but a deeper sense of his vital presence in the world and in our hearts, and a more adventurous resolve to make him known to our fellowmen in Christ.

When a writer of unquestionable sincerity and power, of rare insight and expressive charm, like Miss Willa Cather, chooses for the central place, in a novel, characters to whom the divine presence in the world is the most real of all realities and the service of that presence the highest of all adventures, I give thanks for one more great artist who does not ban human goodness from the field of art. Of all unhappy censorships that would be the unhappiest, the most insane. To read and understand *Death Comes for the Archbishop* helps one to be sure of the

sanity of true genius, makes one glad to live in a world where, despite evil and darkness, virtue still shines in manhood, and wins love, and gains the victory that death can not take away.

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